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*Summer • 1955*


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Published quarterly since 1932 by Phi Beta Kappa. *Publication Office:* Box 2-W, Richmond 5, Virginia. *Editorial and Circulation Offices:* 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington 9, D. C. *Subscription Rates:* $1.00 a copy, $4.00 one year, $7.00 two years, $9.00 three years, foreign and Canadian—50 cents a year additional for postage. *Advertising Office:* 217 Canner Street, New Haven 11, Connecticut. *National Retail Distributor:* B. DeBoer, P. O. Box 761, Hoboken, New Jersey.

Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Richmond, Virginia, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Printed by the William Byrd Press, Richmond, Virginia. Copyright, 1955, by the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa.

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Volume 24 *SUMMER, 1955* Number 3

## CONTENTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cold War Troubles at Home | *Robert Langbaum* | 265 |
| The Success, *A Poem* | *Robert Pack* | 280 |
| Jehovah's Witnesses as a Proletarian Movement | *Werner Cohn* | 281 |
| Defense Means Protection | *Lewis A. Dexter* | 299 |
| The Olympian Cowboy | *Harry Schein* Translated by *Ida M. Alcock* | 309 |
| POEMS: | | |
| Two Poems for Irwin Edman: Earth, Sea and Sky: 1919; In Memoriam: 1954 | *Joseph Freeman* | 321 |
| The Eve of Capricorn | *Rose Burgunder* | 323 |
| Sleeping Beauty | *Louis Simpson* | 324 |
| Early in the Morning | *Louis Simpson* | 325 |
| News from Our Town | *Marcia Nardi* | 326 |
| Can These Stones Speak? | *William Croft Dickinson* | 329 |
| A Little Faith A Little Envy: A Note on Santayana and Auden | *Gerald Weales* | 340 |
| IF YOU DON'T MIND MY SAYING SO | *Joseph Wood Krutch* | 348 |
| THE REVOLVING BOOKSTAND | | 352 |
| Reviews by *Asher Lans, Paul B. Sears, Robert N. Linscott* and *David L. Marks* | | |
| Brief comments on nineteen outstanding books of the previous quarter | | 369 |
| THE SCHOLAR'S SCRATCH PAD | *Margaret Mead* | 378 |
| THE READER REPLIES | | 383 |

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THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

VOLUME 24 *Summer, 1955* NUMBER 3

# Cold War Troubles At Home

ROBERT LANGBAUM

SINCE IT IS PROBABLY IMPOSSIBLE to be too suspicious of Russian and Chinese intentions, a case might be made out that America, in being more suspicious than her allies, is more clearheaded than they are in dealing with communism abroad. But I am quite certain, after having returned from my third summer in Western Europe, that in dealing with communism at home, we are of all the democracies the most confused and bedeviled.

We are bedeviled, I think, just because, having mustered from our relatively clear view of the situation abroad the greatest amount of anti-Communist energy, we have the least considerable domestic enemy upon whom to expend it. We cope badly with the problem of domestic communism for the same reason that the large quadruped copes badly with the gadfly—our exertions are too large for the occasion. The more the horse or cow swishes its tail and bucks and kicks, the more it defeats itself until, if the fight goes on long enough, the big animal drops from exhaustion. The fight is all the more painful to watch because the disproportion in the size and substance of the antagonists renders it absurd.

Our fight is especially absurd and inefficient in that at least half of us, interrupted in our anti-Communist effort by alarm over the

✪ Critic and teacher of literature, ROBERT LANGBAUM has written on literary and political subjects for *Commentary* and other periodicals, and is the author of a forthcoming book on the Romantic tradition in literature.



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excessive energies of the rest, must turn round and fight at the same time both Reds and Red-baiters. And we liberals, to tell the truth, fight the latter with a great deal more satisfaction than we fight the former. For in spite of all we have learned about Russia and international communism since the purge trials of the thirties, the fight against communism at home remains a thorn in the liberal conscience.

The fight requires that we stop at every point to test against the facts the axioms of our liberal faith. It brings us up against difficult questions—whether a man can be punished for what he thinks, whether Communists should be forbidden to teach, whether the leaders of the Communist party should be jailed, whether the Communist party should be outlawed. To all such questions, the liberal's impulse is to answer with an emphatic "No," just as we are predisposed to believe (with as much chance of being right as wrong) that a Hiss, a Lattimore, an Oppenheimer must be innocent because he is a "victim" of investigation. Most liberals have managed to hold their predispositions in check long enough to look at the facts; indeed, the whole arduous effort of liberal thought in the past decade has been devoted to just that, to building up a finely discriminated anti-Communist position. But the effort has taken a heavy toll in moral satisfaction. For the moral life does not proceed easily from finely discriminated ideas which each time have to be thought out again from the beginning, but rather from broad assumptions which can become emotional and even automatic commitments easily translatable into action.

It is, therefore, with a kind of war whoop of relief and exultation that liberals turn around from the anti-Communist effort to meet the threat from the right. And the more the anti-Communist effort worries us, the more savagely we lay into the attack on McCarthyism. For in this fight we are at home again, the old slogans serve, the old certainties seem justified. The old enemies are once again on the other side, the old friends are once again banded together. The fight against Communists opposes us to fellow travelers, who are the sort of people one understands and who seem, therefore, incapable of harm. But the fight against McCarthyism opposes us to the sort of people one doesn't know and who seem, therefore, ca-



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pable of unlimited harm. Besides, unlike the Communists who are difficult to identify and have no political power, the right-wingers are substantially visible and substantial competitors for power, so the fight against them becomes more immediately necessary and more practically rewarding.

The right-wingers, for their part, not finding identifiable Communists enough for their excessive zeal, soon start pinning the Communist label on Pinks and liberals. And once they have begun, they find the latter game not only more absorbing but more rewarding. For again, the liberals are competitors for power, and a great many more legislative seats and government jobs are to be acquired through labeling them Communists than through dragging any real Communist out of his insignificant corner.

In other words, there enters into the routine contest between Democrats and Republicans a note of terrible urgency, accusations of treason, of communism and fascism, of selling out to the Reds or to Chiang—all conducted as though the fall of the H-bomb depended on the outcome. The result is an atmosphere of crisis and imminent catastrophe compared to which the European scene seems positively halcyon, a place where there is still time for debate before the Bomb falls and all voices are stilled forever.

Liberals see clearly enough, of course, how disproportionate to the actual danger is the right-wingers' fear of Communist infiltration. But we have not, I think, been sufficiently aware that we have poured into our own counterattack the same excessive energy, that we have used the McCarthy scare in the same way that the right-wingers have used the Red scare—as a quantity more psychological than political, as a projection of our fears and self-distrust before the vast responsibility of American power.

For the McCarthy and Red scares have this in common: In both cases Americans fear a loss of control over their own minds and wills and, consequently, over the forces at their disposal. In both cases, we know that the enemy is no match for us numerically or politically; yet when we express our fear of him, what we are saying essentially is that we fear he may be able to convert us without our wanting or even knowing it, that we fear in him a certain witchcraft power to infiltrate beneath our skins, making us be and do



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something other than what we want. The fear that we will become Communists or Fascists matches, I think, the more fundamental fear of our own capacity for destruction, the fear that we will one day drop the H-bomb and destroy the world without wanting to.

Liberals will see what I mean when I describe as fear of witchcraft the right-wingers' fear that our society is riddled with Reds who are subtly stealing dominion over our minds and wills. But to show that we liberals have no cause to consider ourselves exempt from the fears that haunt our fellow-Americans, let me tell the story of my own surrender to the McCarthy scare.

Now that the Senator's political fortunes have entered a decline from which they have yet to emerge, it is easy enough to prove that he was not such a menace as we had thought. But since his career is by no means over and since the conditions which made him so effective are still with us, it is, I think, of more than historical interest to recall the atmosphere of that famous last week in February when he defied the Army, and the Army, after a brief show of resistance, capitulated. It looked at that point as though there was no stopping McCarthy and McCarthyism. I remember how alarmed I was by a warning in the *Nation* that such movements gain momentum so fast that you wake up one day to find it is too late to stop them. You can imagine, then, that it came as something of an explosion when, a week later, the news broke at the University at which I teach that the student Young Republican Club had invited Senator McCarthy to speak on campus.

True, the news did not come entirely as a surprise. The student newspaper had published a report that the invitation was being considered; it had come out editorially against the invitation; and the question had been debated in its correspondence columns. Still, no one had expected the invitation really to materialize, and to have it materialize at just this time was to have the whole ghastly Washington scene materialize before our eyes. It was as though we were to be the first victims of the newly won McCarthy triumph.

It is also true that after the vote to issue the invitation had been taken, the faculty advisor of the Young Republican Club read a letter of resignation in which he said that he could not associate



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himself with the irresponsible remarks the Senator might be expected to make. And it is true that the Club itself issued the invitation with the proviso that the Senator was not to mention the University in his speech. As I had the story the next day, the overwhelming majority of the Club voted for the invitation. But most of the students who spoke for it expressed their abhorrence of the Senator and his ways; they simply thought it would be interesting and instructive to get a look at him and hear what he might have to say for himself. As one worried Young Republican tried to explain it to me, "We thought it might be interesting to hear his philosophy," and then, aware of my scorn, "if he has such a thing."

My friends and I were in no mood, however, to give weight to these mitigating circumstances. We talked each other into a fever. The student newspaper reported that the invitation had been inspired by the McCarthy organization itself; and we told each other that McCarthy's speech was to climax an exposé of communism in our area, which had been running for some time in the newspaper of a nearby city. We assured each other that if McCarthy bothered to come to our campus, it would be to blow off a very big lid, to name names here and at other universities—that he would use his speech here as another attempt (after his battle with Harvard) to gain a foothold in the universities. I, for one, could already feel the chill breath of fascism blowing down my overheated neck.

For me, the news came as a kind of personal accusation. I had been planning an article on campus thinking, and had in mind a flippant beginning: "Campus thinking is pretty much what you would expect—everyone is against McCarthy." Now, those complacent words shamed me. What was needed instead, I decided, was an article calling the liberals to arms; asking for an end to the period of liberal self-criticism; suggesting that we had sufficiently purged, reformed and renovated ourselves; and pointing out that if we didn't look up soon from our preoccupation with "new liberalisms" and "new conservatisms," we might find ourselves saddled with an old-fashioned despotism. In short, what was needed was action. The arduous intellectual effort of the past decade, the finely discriminated anti-Communist position, the need to remember that because McCarthy is wrong his enemies are not necessarily right—



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all this was thrown out the window as I found myself seized by an irresistible desire to rush out and join something, to join up with anyone who would *do* something.

"The very thought of his coming so close," I said to an admirably sane conservative at the height of my fever, "the very thought sends the chills down my spine." He smiled benignly and asked if I had been equally disturbed when Howard Fast spoke here a few years ago. "No," I said, aware that he had me in a corner, "that was different. Fast was no threat." He didn't have to answer that one, he just smiled. The logical victory was his. Nevertheless, I was right.

The proof that I was right came once the wind began to blow the other way for Senator McCarthy, and on every side people began to turn against him. Once that happened, it ceased to matter whether he spoke here or not. We could afford now to hear his "philosophy." He was no longer a threat. We hardly noticed the news item in which the student newspaper announced that the Senator had been unable to accept the invitation to speak here. And once the televised Army-McCarthy hearings got under way, exposing to view the disconcerted bully who had committed a most incredibly foolish blunder, the McCarthy legend evaporated quickly. Crouched as I was for the spring, but now with nothing substantial to spring at, I found it difficult to remember how the mere prospect of his presence could have disturbed me so much.

Looking back now on that feverish week, I see that the thing we were afraid of was what polite people call a "scene," some subtle infection of atmosphere in the hall, some effluence which McCarthy in the flesh might project, against which our neighbors, if not ourselves, could not stand proof. A Young Republican suggested, I remember, that one of our professors might debate with McCarthy; the suggestion was greeted with wry smiles all around. For though we dared not admit it, we were afraid that logic and argument would be so much chaff in the wind before the brutal insistence of his mindless repetitions. Here was another autonomous force—like that of the bomb and the world events leading to explosion of the bomb, like that of the dark, unknown populace out there who were potential McCarthy supporters—unsusceptible to rational control. We were afraid to face McCarthy because we had



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no confidence that reason would stand up against his sub-rational appeal.

That was our mistake, as it has been the mistake of liberals generally in dealing with McCarthy. For if it is dangerous to underestimate the enemy, it is at least as dangerous to overestimate him; since in politics, as elsewhere, "thinking makes it so." To lose the sense of one's power is in fact to lose one's power. To believe the enemy powerful is to make him powerful. If there is one lesson to be learned from the recent collapse of the McCarthy myth, it is that the inventors and sustainers of that myth have been not those who admired McCarthy but those who feared him. His admirers seem to have thought of him not as the invincible medicine man of the mob instincts, but rather as a counter-revolutionary underdog fighting singlehanded against the powerful forces of an entrenched radicalism. It is not these people who are likely to have deserted him, now that his reverses have made him more an underdog than ever, confirming their suspicions that the country is being run by left-wingers. The vociferous demonstrations against the Senate motion to censure McCarthy are a sign that the solid pro-McCarthy core will grow more solid than ever, provided the Senator continues to fight.

There were, to be sure, the good people who, still misled by McCarthy as late as last spring, were finally disillusioned by the revelations on their television screens. But I cannot believe that at so late a stage in the game their number can have been sizable enough to account for McCarthy's loss of prestige. No, the McCarthy myth collapsed when those people who had feared him were surprised and relieved to find how easily he could be punctured once anyone in authority cared to do it, and how ineffective, how even absurd the old threats and blusterings could look. The McCarthy myth collapsed when liberals came to feel that reason is still in authority in this country.

In the same way, the Red scare would collapse should conservatives learn to distinguish law-abiding citizens holding minority and even dangerous opinions, from "active" agents of a foreign power; and should they come to feel that the authorities are perfectly capable of dealing with the latter, as indeed they always have, through



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police channels. Legally, it does not matter whether or not the person stealing government documents for the Russians is a Communist, whether he has acted for ideological or mercenary reasons. Our civil liberties would be safer if, in prosecuting him, we paid less attention to his politics, for which we have no right to convict him, and more to his crime, for which we have every right to convict him. Spies, after all, are not new on the international scene. Being more aware of this than we, our European allies make no political issue over Communist spies, but deal with them by means of long established machinery.

But the excessive energy devoted to the Red and McCarthy scares and our whole tendency on both the right and left to overestimate the domestic enemy are signs that we do not trust the established machinery to protect us. We do not trust it because we are less afraid of overt acts of treachery, with which the police can cope, than of something with which the police cannot cope—the theft of our minds and hearts. This lack of confidence in ourselves communicates itself to our friends abroad, and now that we have become the arbiters of their destiny, frightens them to death.

Over and over last summer, I asked Europeans why, having been so popular with them when we did nothing for Europe, we have become so unpopular now that we do so much. And always the answer was essentially the same—that the charming qualities of a child become frightening when the child turns master. I was told that Americans are too immature, too psychologically and intellectually unstable to be trusted with the bomb. It is always with the bomb in mind that Europeans watch the violent oscillations of American controversy; and it is the excess of motion that they fear. They watch us, I gathered, with the breathless panic of parents watching an overactive child playing among priceless teacups, or as the audiences of old slapstick movies used to watch the heedless comedian seesawing wildly over an abyss.

We object, of course, to such condescension from people who can hardly survive without our leadership. And yet if we are quite honest, we must admit that our friends abroad merely articulate what we feel about ourselves. For the thing that explains the fever of the American scene as compared to the European, is the fact



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that, though we are in less immediate danger than our European allies, we are aware that the responsibility rests with us for the decisions that may lead to peace or war, victory or defeat, and we do not feel quite adequate to the responsibility.

Our sense of inadequacy has had its good results. It accounts, I think, for the remarkable growth of interest since the war in culture and travel. Prosperity alone will not explain the difference between the American in Europe these days and the American in Europe after the First World War. During the twenties, one gathers from written accounts, Americans abroad flaunted their provinciality, thereby charming the Europeans. These days, Americans aim to assimilate culturally, to be as European and as cosmopolitan as possible, thereby inviting the condescension of the Europeans. I remember thinking, as I saw last summer all the enthusiastic young Americans on the rampage for European culture, that after all they were performing a public service for their country. They were preparing themselves, at their own expense, for America's new position as leader of the Western world.

The bad results of our sense of inadequacy all stem from fear of America's new position—a fear which is boundless because it is only half conscious. In order to find an adequate objective counterpart for this fear and an outlet for the crisis mechanism which it sets working in us, we introduce into our political controversy the spirit of crisis, we exaggerate the malevolence and power of our adversaries. We are equally zealous in hunting down our enemies where they do exist and in inventing them where they do not.

What with the Communist leaders having been jailed and the Administration having assured us that all Communists, fellow travelers and remotest acquaintances of fellow travelers were now ousted from government, I spent last summer abroad, secure in the sense that the country was reasonably safe from communism. When I returned to find that the Attorney General was proposing a new system of legislation to "rid the country of subversives," my reaction was a European one: But wherever are they going to find any more subversives?

There are, I think, at least four reasons why the Europeans man-



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age so much better than we to keep their equilibrium over the issue of domestic communism. First, they simply have less energy to expend upon it. Whereas Europe emerged from the last war drained of energy and aware of counting less in the world than before, America emerged feeling stronger than ever, flexing its new-found muscles and looking for new worlds to conquer. In fact, we emerged with more energy than we quite know what to do with.

Second, Europe has not been psychologically poised for war. Her posture has been not only defensive but prayerful. Things may of course change with the new European defense arrangement, but until now Europeans have not, I think, really *seen* themselves as resisting attack in any positive sense. On the Continent at least, they have rather imagined they would be swept into the war by whichever side managed to occupy them first. While such a position is unenviable, it does not call forth the energies and tensions that come with the will to win and the sense that the responsibility for victory rests with yourself alone. If the intellectual atmosphere of Europe seems freer than ours, it is because European intellectuals are less fettered by this sense of responsibility. The "neutralists" among them feel free to play at being pro-Communist and anti-American because they know that in any case the Americans are there to manage the practical exigencies of world politics—just as before the last war, Americans felt secure behind the imperial power of the British lion, whose tail they felt free, for that very reason, to twist.

Third, the French and Italians at least, have in their Communist parties an enemy large and real enough to absorb whatever cold war energies they have mustered. There are advantages, paradoxical as it may seem, in having a sizable Communist party with its place on the ballot, its acknowledged supporters and its deputies in parliament. The enemy does not take on metaphysical proportions; he is perfectly measurable and you have a ground on which to combat him. You do not have to confuse yourself by worrying about how much freedom to grant him, or whether he is real or phantom. You can neither invent him nor determine what is to be done with him since he is too substantial for the one and too powerful for the other. Best of all, you do not have to look around for ambiguous people upon whom to pin the Communist label when there are so



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many self-avowed candidates for the honor. Because the energy the French and Italians expend against their Communists has its entirely adequate counterpart in reality, the fight is no different in quality from any other political fight. It is dangerous politically, but not psychologically and morally.

Compare our own domestic situation where, having caught our few spies, and jailed or exiled from public life our few outstanding Communists, we now have to expend our vast capacity for belligerency on worrying the distinction between liberal, Pink and Red. Or consider how curious it is that we should worry so much about unanimity of opinion on an issue (resistance to communism) about which the country is united as perhaps never before in its history. Certainly, we are more united against communism than we were against nazism, or against the Germans in the First World War, or even against the South in the Civil War, or the British in the Revolutionary War. If war with Russia broke out tomorrow, it would probably be (with the possible exception of the war against the Japanese) a war unique in our history for the negligible opposition to it. Indeed, it is just because dissenters are so hard to find that we seem to need a witchcraft enemy, an enemy who is at once everywhere and nowhere and can bend us to his will without our realizing it. For in the absence of substantial dissent, it is only an enemy of such unlimited proportions who can account for our unlimited anxieties.

The fourth reason for our domestic disequilibrium underlies the other reasons and does us credit by refuting the idea that our troubles come from immaturity. For it is just to the extent that our foreign policy has been lucid and mature that our domestic situation has been difficult.

American diplomacy, more successfully than that of our European allies, has managed to resist the Communist analysis of the cold war as a struggle between rich and poor, exploiters and exploited. The French and British, perhaps because of a sense of guilt about their imperialist past, are more subject to the "neutralist" prejudice that it is somehow the side of reaction to be opposed to communism and that our side are the counter-revolutionary aggressors who can have "peaceful coexistence" if we will



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but grant it. The Americans, on the other hand, have since Truman's time refused to allow the Communists an ideological foot in the door as representatives of reform and progress.

The task has been easier for our diplomacy because, rightly or wrongly, Americans do not feel guilty about their social arrangements past or present. They even feel that their society comes as close as any has yet come to being just. Our friends abroad smile at such crude self-righteousness; yet it has given us the moral strength to organize their resistance to communism. It has given us a strength simple and crude enough to match that of the Russians—a strength unique in the non-Communist world which has been for the most part too aware of its own shortcomings to defend itself with any conviction against the brash certainties of Communist slogans.

The practical advantage of the American non-ideological analysis of the cold war is that we do not weaken our resolution with misgivings about suppressing native insurrections in backward areas. In a place like Indo-China, we recognize not a Communist insurrection but a Communist invasion usurping for its own purposes a nationalist insurrection; so that we see ourselves saving genuine nationalism—as when we co-operated with the Vietnamese nationalists in breaking the hold of French colonialism.

We are able to maintain such a position because we see operating not a Marxian law of class war but the older, more fundamental law that in politics, as elsewhere, nature abhors a vacuum. We see such areas as vacuums which the Russians and Chinese must inevitably fill unless we fill them first by making them self-sustaining. We have no misgivings about filling in the vacuums because we have sufficient confidence in the gifts we have to offer to feel that in making backward countries both economically and militarily viable units, we are bringing them the only beneficial kind of revolution. At the same time, our non-ideological view of the cold war enables us to block Communist advances while maintaining perfectly correct relations with the Russians, and without committing ourselves *on principle* to any holy war to the death. This is the policy of "containment," a policy we still follow, though the present Administration prefers not to use the name.

But effective as such a policy is internationally, it is almost im-



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possible to maintain domestically. For it requires of us two opposing postures. On the one hand, we need a vast mobilization of moral and physical energy in order to organize the resistance to communism. On the other hand, we dare not use all the energy we have mustered. We dare not use all our military strength for fear of upsetting our policy of carefully limited belligerency. And we dare not follow our moral principles to their "logical conclusions."

We dare not conclude that because it was right to fight in Korea, it was therefore right to fight through to total victory; or that because Red China has been criminal, it would be legalizing crime to grant her recognition or a seat in the United Nations. Those extremists who would have us walk out if Red China comes in would wreck the UN and our whole system of collective security in order to preserve our moral consistency on this single issue—a kind of right which would create many wrongs. Consistency with our foreign policy would dictate that we not tie our hands in advance, that we grant or withhold recognition and our consent to a UN seat as best suits our advantage, and that we drive a hard bargain exacting the best possible price for any such concessions.

The need to be both crusaders and pragmatists puts us in the position of a high-spirited horse whose rider simultaneously gives him the spurs and reins him in. And like such a horse we buck frantically, we exhaust ourselves with useless motion. The dangers are obvious. Internationally, too much moral momentum at home could plunge us into war. Domestically, the need to find an outlet for excess energy, to find enemies adequate to our capacity for belligerency, has already given our discussions an apocalyptic tone which is dangerous ultimately to our political freedom and immediately to our cultural freedom.

We see signs of the latter danger in what the liberal journals are calling the "new conformism." But the conformism I have in mind is not simply that conformism of the right of which liberals complain; it is a conformism of right, left and center—a need to think in blocs, to line up on either side of the barricades, to turn ideas into slogans, and commitments, even artistic commitments, into programs. The immediate danger to our cultural freedom comes



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not from any deliberate suppression of unpopular ideas (there are still platoons of the opposition one can join), but rather from the big noise of combat, the noise of the big certainties, of the ideas organized for action. The danger is that the din will drown out the thought too precise, the perception too fastidious, to be translatable into action; that without anyone planning it, there will simply be no ear left for the only kind of culture that is *free*—quiet culture, the still small voice of reason.

What, then, is to be done? The sheer understanding of our predicament would seem to offer the best hope of solution. If we understand that our dual role of crusader against and negotiator with communism is essentially contradictory, we are less likely to make the false step in either direction which could cause trouble. And if we understand that our contradictory needs both to muster and to suppress moral energy are causing our tensions, the understanding should help to diminish the tensions.

Beyond this, we must stop granting the enemy a greater victory than he himself would dare to hope for. Conservatives should stop proclaiming that Communist masterminds are making a tool of our government. Liberals should stop proclaiming that they no longer dare speak freely, subscribe to left-wing periodicals, sign petitions, or place their names on lists; their "discretion" may create, without a struggle, the situation they fear. Above all, men of good will, liberals and conservatives alike, must stand firm on the principle that no idea, no intellectual commitment whatever, can be criminal, that only actions against the law can be criminal. One way of giving effect to this principle would be to reaffirm as a rule of intellectual procedure that a man may take any position whatever without having his motives impugned, that we refute arguments with arguments, not with pejorative labels. Another way would be to commit ourselves as openly and indiscreetly as possible, to refuse to preface a statement of opinion with the assurance that of course we are good Americans. We are good Americans if in our actions we obey the law, and in our beliefs, our conscience. It is only by insisting on that prerogative, and by exercising it as much as possible, that we can keep it alive.



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But we need something more than the mere negative avoidance of excess. We need a positive self-confidence, a confidence in the moral and intellectual soundness of ourselves and our neighbors, and in the capacity of our political institutions to represent that soundness. It is time to reverse the direction of our domestic exhortations. This is no longer the time to worry about complacency, to whip ourselves up by telling each other that we are at war and that at home we are threatened from the right and left. That job has been well done.

Our job now is to tell each other that we are not at war, that we are in a state which may last for fifty years, and that our democracy and culture will never survive those fifty years if we must consider ourselves for all that time at war. It is time to remind each other that there are few Communists among us and that the McCarthyites, sizable minority that they are, at least are no new minority among us—we knew them as America-Firsters and Coughlinites before the war. It is time to remind each other that nobody, neither Communists nor McCarthyites, can steal our freedom from us as long as we want it. It is time not so much to minimize the danger at home (nobody could do that who has seen the still formidable support McCarthy was able to muster for his Senate fight) as to maximize our capacity to meet it, to make sure we do not forget that reason and good will are still in the saddle in this country.

Only with this kind of self-confidence, a self-confidence characteristic of the English-speaking peoples and probably responsible for the success of democracy among them, can we feel sufficiently secure to allot to the suppression of traitorous activity only our police strength, while reserving our moral and intellectual strength for our own self-cultivation. This self-cultivation would have to proceed from a core of identity so secure that we could afford to entertain and, in some cases, absorb foreign and even apparently dangerous ideas. For it is by turning to its own account the ideas opposing it that a culture continues to live and grow.



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# *The Success*

ROBERT PACK

There is no luxury in accomplishment.
The winds move by me as they did before.
I watch the sparrows flit from tree to tree,
And with such sights prepare my mind for sleep.
Nothing in the city beckons me,
Not friends, nor my success. Though I am nothing
But the things I see, the people met
Or watched, lived with, imagined, dreamed of, known—
Because all work is done in solitude—
Their old inscrutable delight seems gone.

Now my mood is rich in melancholy.
I find it also in the thundering clouds,
Hysterical leaves, and in the little noises
Of the grass, the silence of light on stone,
The silence of my thoughts that pass. The air
Is filled with all the perfume of despair,
And I would eat the warm sad bread, drink deep
The waters of the tragic rain until this pain,
Because it has no enemies, only the burden
Of family and friends, might bring me sleep.

Success is failure, for we start again;
Accomplishment, the mark where one has been
Among the many places unexplored.
As with old pleasures, we tire of old despairs—
Like such an argument, the dawn appears,
Proclaims: to be content, be not content,
Luxury is a joy as you watch it go.
I rest, yet feel the changing day disclose
(While I think of love and all its wild reward)
That nameless anxiety in repose.

✪ ROBERT PACK, poetry editor for *Discovery*, teaches at The New School. His first book of poems, *The Irony of Joy*, will be published by Scribner's in September.



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# Jehovah's Witnesses as a Proletarian Movement

WERNER COHN

OF ALL THE NUMEROUS SMALL RELIGIOUS SECTS in this country, that of the Jehovah's Witnesses is possibly the best known. Its members are seen proclaiming the Kingdom of God on the street corners of all our cities and towns; the United States Supreme Court has had occasion to consider the Witnesses over and over again since the First World War; international Witness conventions, held in New York's Yankee Stadium in 1950 and again in 1953, have astounded the press and the public by their huge attendance and their superb organization; and the Witnesses, partly as a result of such aggressive slogans as "Religion is a Snare and a Racket," have often been the object of intense hostility and mob violence.

The most usual immediate response toward the Witnesses touches also, in my opinion, that which is sociologically most important about them: people feel that here is something very "curious." Whether one is attracted toward them or has one's hostility aroused, one cannot help noticing that the Witnesses are *different* and that they do not seem to fit into the patterns of our everyday lives. As I will try to show, the Witnesses are actually separated by an almost airtight spiritual barrier from the rest of American society; the organization is truly a universe unto itself.

A close study of the Witnesses has convinced me, now, that the

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organization is typical of a certain sociological type which I call "proletarian," which includes not only the radical religious sects but also such other fanatical movements as the traditional German youth movement *Wandervögel* (literally "roaming birds") and some of the Zionist youth groups. Most important of all, it also includes the Nazi and Communist movements. Following Toynbee, I use the term "proletarian" to describe a movement which lives in, but is not of, a given society. I take this to be the original meaning of the word in our modern languages. When Marx described the working class as "proletariat," he wished to indicate that it lives and works in, but does not partake of capitalist society. He spoke of the worker's "alienation" from the conditions of his work; he advocated a workers' organization that would function within, but look beyond the present society. A radical version of this precept is the program of all proletarian movements.

I should emphasize in the beginning that their common quality of being proletarian does not make very different groups identical in other respects. In my own estimation of them, there is a tremendous difference between Zionist youth groups, which arouse my interest and sympathy, and the totalitarians, whom I abhor. While I believe that totalitarianism is an extreme consequence of all proletarian movements, I also realize fully that one cannot judge things simply by the extreme consequences to which they might lead.

It is not difficult, now, to recognize a proletarian movement intuitively by its aura of social estrangement: these movements do not participate in the charitable, religious or political activities of the community—they have a profound distrust for social institutions. They might, of course, utilize institutions; the Communists utilize parliamentary institutions and trade unions, and Jehovah's Witnesses utilize the courts to protect their organization. But utilization is not participation. The distinction is perhaps best illustrated by the Communist role in the European parliamentary institutions. Non-Communists who participate in these institutions deal with legislative proposals as important in their own right; proletarians, on the other hand, can deal with such matters only as maneuvers



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to further aims which are essentially outside parliamentary competence.

Still on the level of an intuitive recognition of the proletarian character of fanatical movements, we invariably find a number of "separation rites"—demonstrative practices by which the proletarians set themselves apart from everyone else. For one thing, there is always a peculiar jargon of the proletarian group; Arthur Koestler, in *The God That Failed,* tells the story of how the Gestapo was able to spot German Communists by the way they turned a phrase even when speaking about the most non-political subject, and I myself shall never forget a fellow-traveling acquaintance who remembered the title of Ribble's classic *The Rights of Infants* as *The Democratic Rights of Children.* "Zionese," the jargon of extreme Zionist youth groups, mixes Hebrew phrases with English in such a manner that the language becomes altogether unintelligible to the outsider, as in this passage from a journal published by one of them, Hashomer Hatzair: "And so, the moshavot ended, the tents folded, the songs died out in the machaneh, and against the darkness of the night a shura at attention was silhouetted. . . . The degel came slowly down. . . ." Jehovah's Witnesses, finally, boast that their "ability to speak a 'secondary language' . . . unites them far more effectively and completely than a language such as English unites all English-speaking peoples."

## I

Examination reveals that, despite their many obvious differences, the ideologies of the various proletarian groupings show the most striking resemblances: invariably they emphasize eschatology. A cataclysmic end of the world, with a millennium following, is prophesied by all the movements.

The proletarians, of course, are not alone in holding eschatological views. All believing Christians do, and, as I have indicated, all the denominations that issue from Marx do too. But it is the radical sectarians among the Christians, and the Communists among the Marxists, who *emphasize* eschatology. This "doctrine of the last days" is central to proletarians (and only peripheral to non-



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proletarians) because it says, in effect, that nothing that is going on now is really very important, except insofar as it destroys the status quo; it allows proletarians to reject responsibility for, or interest in, any of the affairs of "this world."

Proletarian eschatology typically contains a particular esoteric knowledge system, a doctrine of rejection of the world, and a description of the millennium. It is these elements to which I refer collectively as the proletarian ideology.

Esoteric knowledge is most familiar to us in its Communist and Nazi forms; the Communist view that dialectics form a superscience and invalidate "bourgeois" science and the Nazis' theories on race are the most immediate examples. Proletarians feel that they—and they alone—have access to certain facts and to a body of knowledge which are infinitely superior to the common sense of the larger society: its truths are by definition esoteric since they are not accessible to anyone outside the proletarians' universe.

All religious belief, in a certain sense, partakes similarly of the esoteric, since it always requires a believer's faith to appreciate the truly religious; and it is also probably true that ultimately elements of faith are necessary for an acceptance of what is now known as the "scientific method." But there are degrees, not only of reasonableness itself, but also of the proletarian tendency. As will be shown later, our social structure everywhere has proletarian elements; and as everyone knows, the most reasonable has its unreasonable sides. But the fact remains that there is a fundamental area of common assumptions, that is to say, a *common* sense, which is accepted alike by American Protestants and Catholics, by Democrats and Republicans, and (for a European example) by all the Anglicans and Catholics and Nonconformists and Laborites and Conservatives in England—and that Jehovah's Witnesses and other proletarian groups stand outside this common sense.

The esoteric belief subscribed to by the Witnesses is especially instructive for a study of proletarian movements in general. It has all the essential qualities of proletarian ideology without evoking the tense emotional reactions which nowadays make objective discussion of the totalitarians so difficult.



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According to Witness doctrine, the Kingdom of God began in 1914. Since then, God and Satan have shared in the rule of the world, as they will continue to do until some time in the near future. This joint rule is very unstable and will terminate after the coming battle of Armageddon, at which time Satan will be defeated in a bloody war and the theocratic millennium will begin.

Human beings are divided into two classes: the "heavenly class," consisting of 144,000, and the "other sheep," consisting of all the rest. The heavenly class will share governmental power with Jesus during the millennium; it will reside in heaven, and from there direct the theocracy. Many of the other sheep will perish during the battle of Armageddon; the rest—presumably those who accept the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses—will live on this earth forever. "Millions now living," say the Witnesses, "will never die."

Most of the heavenly class died during previous generations, and they will have to be resurrected immediately after the battle of Armageddon. But there are some—estimated by the Witnesses to number 20,221 as of 1952—who are still living and functioning in the Witness organization. This "remnant" will ascend from the earth directly to heaven after Armageddon.

Witness esoteric knowledge is quite exact when it comes to dates and figures. It has definitely established that Adam was created in the fall of 4025 B.C. The year 1914—the beginning of the Kingdom—was arrived at by the most painstaking computations. A short quotation will give the flavor of this research:

> From Genesis 7:11, 24, 8:3, 4, we learn that five months are exactly 150 days, thirty days to a month, thus giving us 360 days for a year according to Bible reckoning. Further, in Revelation 12:16 we have a time period of 1,260 days, which in verse 14 is also referred to as being "a period, periods (that is, two periods) and a half a period of time," or three and a half times. So our seven times or years would be seven times 360 days or twice 1,260 days for a total of 2,520 years.
>
> . . . Since those nations began trampling Jerusalem underfoot in 607 B.C., then 2,520 years later, or A.D. 1914, would mark the coming of him whose right it is and the restoration of sane, divine dominion over mankind.



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I have purposely selected this passage because it contains so much that is typical of all proletarian ideology. First, there is the close, mathematical reasoning; the argument is presented in a manner that appeals to our most rational faculties. Second, the argument is completely esoteric, for ordinary reasoning power alone is of no help in trying to understand it. For those equipped with no more than the common sense (i.e., for those lacking the esoteric insights), the passage contains at least two unbreachable barriers: (1) The word "periods" that appears in Revelation 12:14 is immediately followed by the Witness interpolation "that is, two periods." But if we do not take it for granted that "periods" means "two periods," the whole calculation topples. (2) The date 607 B.C. is not entered in any of the standard secular or religious histories as the year in which "nations began trampling Jerusalem underfoot," so far as I can tell after considerable research. The date is unique to Witness historians; they do not bother to discuss just how it was arrived at, but flatly attack all criticisms of their historical method with the remark that they "are not called upon to harmonize these [chronological computations] with the tangled records of secular history."

The proletarian doctrines of rejection are almost identical in the various groups. Everything in this world is wicked; the values of society are superficial, hypocritical, false; in fact, there are no meaningful ideological differences in the world except those that exist between the inside (the given proletarian movement) and the outside (everyone else). Furthermore, the present order is doomed, and will presently be replaced by a new and absolutely perfect one. Obviously no interest should be taken in any of the affairs of this world, since such affairs are destined for an early, complete and violent termination.

To Jehovah's Witnesses, the worldly institutions—governments, religions, international organizations—are all involved in a vast Satanic conspiracy against the Kingdom. The United Nations is described as a "many-membered beastly association of nations," as "the disgusting thing of Matthew 24:15 and Daniel 11:31." The government of the United States, that of Russia, the various Prot-



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estant denominations, and especially the Roman Catholic Church —all these are "tools of Satan" without any important differences among them. After a simple change of its terms, this doctrine becomes identical with that of the Communists, to whom democratic liberalism and nazism are twin aspects of the same capitalist evil; it becomes identical also to Nazi doctrine, which saw no essential difference between believing Catholics and Communists, between democrats and bolshevists.

The proletarian doctrine of rejection is in a sense—certainly in a formal sense—the very core of proletarianism itself. As I use the term here, proletarianism *means* isolation from the world and spiritual detachment from society and its institutions. But as we shall see again and again, proletarians have more than a merely formal opposition to worldly institutions; theirs is a deep-going alienation from the ways of the world, which expresses itself most revealingly in their contempt and mistrust of the ordinary and everyday concerns of society.

Along with a fanatical rejection of the present world, the proletarians present us with visions of a millennium. The Nazis referred to the "Thousand Year Reich"; the Communists invoke "Socialism." "The New World" is the millennium as predicated by Jehovah's Witnesses. The Witnesses describe their utopia as follows:

> Then, with the end of worldly warfare, freedom in the full sense of the word sets in. Freedom from fear will be there, for no more will atomic or hydrogen bombs or the devilish demonic heavens hang like a threatening cloud over the people. Gone will be the need for armed troops . . . or even a local police force. . . . Lawlessness and vice, together with casualty-producing accidents, fires and floods, will be things of the old-world past. Neither will there then be millions of unemployed or displaced persons wandering aimlessly from one city to another. . . .
>
> Famine and drought, together with rationing and black marketing, will cease for all time. . . . The terrestrial globe, free of those who ruin the earth, takes on a new appearance, developing into a place of Edenic grandeur. . . . Then even



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> the beasts of the field will be at peace with one another and their guardian, man.
>
> The visible part of the new world will be a diseaseless "new earth." . . . Aches and pains will die out, as radiant health, unmarred by cancer, influenza, or even a toothache, implants itself in every soul. . . . This means the vanishing of old age, with its wrinkled skin, its gray hair, its feebleness. It means that vigorous, energetic youth, so fleeting today, will be the eternal lot of every faithful human. . . . No dream is this, nor propaganda scheme to solicit for a man-made "better world," but it is the truth.

These utopian visions interest me mainly because they reveal the more subtle and the less conscious difficulties which the proletarian finds in this world. The New World is seen without such everyday hazards as accidents, fires, disease—without even a toothache. It is such things, however, that reality is inevitably made of, and the Witness vision of a world without any kind of grief suggests an underlying inability to come to terms with the risks and dangers inherent in life itself. Freud, in *Totem and Taboo,* had already touched upon the real core of proletarianism when he declared that "the rejection of reality is at the same time a secession from the human community."

The most astounding of all passages that I have seen in the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses deals with survival after Armageddon. It compares the fate of the righteous with that of the rest of humanity:

> The survivors of this "war of the great day of the Almighty" will be his lovers, the New World Society. After the battle they will go forth and look upon the carcasses of those whom Jehovah has slain, unburied, the food of worms that will not die or cease from swarming over the odious carcasses until they have eaten the bones clean, the food of fire mixed with sulphur that will not be extinguished until it has completed the consumption of all remnants of the carcasses. . . .

Those who happen to be outside the "New World Society" (i.e., the Witness organization) clearly do not have much to hope for. But even the survivors of the terrible battle of Armageddon must



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watch their step! Those that are found wanting in obedience will be executed:

> those refusing to keep the Kingdom sabbath [i.e., honor the millennium] by faith and by ceasing from selfish works of sin and false religion will be executed by the Lord of the sabbath and be destroyed eternally.

Speaking even of the children who will be born during the millennium, the Witnesses warn that:

> Every child, reared in the discipline and authoritative advice of Jehovah, will have full opportunity for life through Christ the King. Any not desiring to serve Jehovah will be executed, rightly.

The meaning of the proletarian secession from society lies largely in the escape from the conflicts and ambiguities of reality. Proletarian ideology seeks to end these by forbidding all controversy, and the proletarian's millennial dreams can be interpreted, I think, as fantasy fulfillments of the wish to abolish all the difficulties inherent in ordinary life.

The totalitarians have explored the more horrendous possibilities of proletarianism by acting out these fantasies. Their concentration camps became the grounds where the supposedly unfaithful were "slain," while the righteous were able to "go forth and look upon the carcasses." And not only were the unfaithful slain and executed, but they were destroyed "eternally"; the totalitarian history books do not mention them, for their names have never really existed.

Proletarian ideology fights a constant battle to abolish reality; but the battle now is full of compromises. So long as the movement cannot transform society in the image of its own fantasies, the stubborn material demands of reality intrude at every turn. Once society has been transformed into a totalitarian universe, however, reality can be abolished to a very significant extent. Since men can be made to believe ideology in preference to truth, many of the demands of science and consistency can be overcome. Since terror can be made almost absolute, the most primitive sadistic fantasies



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can be acted out upon prisoners in concentration camps. And since, above all, fanaticism can take the place of self-interest, grandiose and fantastic military campaigns can be carried out without the benefit of military science. These are the extreme consequences of proletarian ideology.

## II

Proletarian organizations show highly interesting similarities in organizational structure. In her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt describes most of these features as they appear in the Nazi and Communist movements; I shall try, with special attention to Jehovah's Witnesses, to show here how her observations might be applied to all proletarian movements. The features to which she directs attention—specifically, irregularity of organizational form, the "onion" form of organization, and underlying mystification—seem to be not only characteristic of the totalitarians, but natural concomitants of proletarianism as such. One more such concomitant is charismatic leadership, which I shall also consider.

The proletarian principle of irregularity rejects all formal organizational structure. Proletarians do utilize these structures, but only for purposes of hiding the actual authority relationships; the classical case is the file clerk in the totalitarian embassy who gives orders to the ambassador. The irregularity in the totalitarian countries becomes most obvious by the fact that the various ostensible lines of command are ill-defined and have a tendency to become tangled. Not only is there a constant rivalry between such structures as army, party and state (or party and espionage machines in the Communist movements outside of Russia), but the line of command within any one of these is unstable and varies from moment to moment. And then there are personal cliques everywhere, cutting across all other allegiances. The result of this kind of arrangement is a situation in which no individual can ever be sure of his status for long; the highest official can become a slave laborer overnight.

Youth-movement organizations are perhaps the prototype of proletarian irregularity. In its revolt against parent domination,



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the youth movement presents the youthful charismatic leader as the only acceptable guide for the adolescent. And while a youth movement often shares many characteristics with such adult-sponsored "youth-serving" groups as the American Boy Scouts or Young Judea, the charismatic quality of "youth leading youth" constitutes an invariable distinction. The youth-movement leader has grown up in the movement and perpetuates the spirit of defiance against authority and regularity; the youth-serving leader, on the other hand, is appointed by the adult authority, is generally paid for his efforts, and tends to give the youth-serving organization a stamp of subservience to authority and of regularity.

As in totalitarian organizations, the principle of irregularity is carefully covered by formal trimmings among Jehovah's Witnesses. Witnesses have three distinct legal corporations: the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society Incorporated, and the International Bible Students' Association. But all three corporations have a total membership of only about 500, whereas there are over 150,000 Witnesses in the United States. Supposedly there are no membership rolls of rank-and-file Witnesses, though the organization keeps very exact statistics of the number and the activities of these people. The work of each Witness is carefully controlled and directed by a central authority; this authority is very real, but it is in no way accounted for by any formal plan of organization.

The top Witness leader—at present N. H. Knorr—is the president of the three legal corporations; he has no other official title. His actual status in the organization, however, is no more defined by his title than was Stalin's. And neither can the status of the secondary Witness leadership be measured by titles. I have found that the most reliable method of establishing the standing of any particular Witness leader is to observe how often his name is mentioned in the Witness publications, and to see how closely it is connected with that of Knorr.

Proletarian groups typically consist of various layers of differing degrees of initiation. At the center are the leader and the elite, at the periphery is the casually associated individual, the sympathizer,



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the fellowtraveler; in between are the ordinary members, who are again stratified according to how far they have gone—or how far they have been permitted to go—into the proletarian universe. This structural characteristic of proletarian organization is called the "onion" form.

The onion form has a direct relationship to the esoteric knowledge of the movement; since the requirements of everyday life make it necessary to maintain a certain minimum of common sense, the proletarian core surrounds itself with layers that increasingly compromise with ordinary reality. While for the Communist elite the products of "bourgeois" science are unacceptable, the Communist movement has a place for "innocents" and "progressives" who are allowed to play with the community's common sense and even with the common science. But these outer peels of the onion do more than merely protect the inner ones from the unfriendly environment of common sense; they also have the function of creating a special aura which, as it emanates from the husk of the proletarian movement, can give rise to social regions in which differences between the common sense and the movement's esoteric knowledge—between sense and non-sense—become obliterated. Such regions have at various times existed in some parts of the liberal sections of the American academic world and in some parts of the European labor movement.

The onion form of Jehovah's Witnesses is almost an exact duplicate of that of the totalitarians. There are the leader and the elite that surround him; there are various classes of field officials, and various classes of rank-and-file members. Some of these classes are institutionally recognized—there are "pioneers," "special pioneers" and "company publishers" (the lowest grade)—though the stratification system as a whole is neither institutionalized nor at all stable. It will be remembered that though there were various official strata of Nazi members—the S.A., the S.S. and its various special formations, among many others—the total stratification system of the Nazis depended on the momentary relative standing of party, state, police and army, as well as on identification with a particular personal clique. The Witnesses' arrangement is similar.



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Witnesses publish two kinds of periodicals. One, *The Watchtower*, deals with the esoteric knowledge system and is almost incomprehensible to outsiders. The other, *Awake*, gives the impression of an interest in the everyday affairs of the world. *The Watchtower*, printed on good bond paper, is the technical journal of the insider; *Awake*, printed on cheap newsprint, is for the sympathizer. Witnesses do not try to hide their opinion that the contents of *Awake*—while necessary to hold the interest of the innocents—are ultimately of an order inferior compared to those of *The Watchtower*. This attitude is typical of proletarians on all levels toward the thinking of those whose place in the onion is more peripheral than their own.

In addition to the marked irregularity of all proletarian organizational life and its onion form, there is an invariable tendency toward deliberate mystification. This is perhaps most obvious in the peculiar addiction to exact statistics from which most of the groups seem to suffer. Historians of Nazi Germany were surprised to find a wealth of Nazi statistics on such matters as the number of Jews killed on any one day, and the number of gold fillings in the teeth of these Jews. The production statistics from the Soviet Union are equally fascinating; while a multitude of exact figures and percentages are presented by the government, they give no important clues to the realities of Soviet economic life.

Jehovah's Witnesses have an equal interest in numbers and exact statistics which is matched only by the exactness with which they tabulate the history of the universe (Adam's creation took place "in the fall of 4025 B.C."). In reporting on their 1953 convention in Yankee Stadium, the Witnesses present figures of attendance, broken down for each day, and for "stadium proper," overflow, and the Trailer City which the Witnesses had established in New Jersey. Looking up the figures for the sessions I attended, I was interested to learn that those present at the morning session of the eighth day numbered 72,469 persons in the stadium and an "overflow" of 14,368. Now there were no tickets, ticket-takers or turnstiles of any sort at the stadium, and, like everyone else in sight, I walked in and out of the stadium several times during the



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session without molestation. I saw nobody counting with hand-counters. While anyone experienced with large crowds could certainly have ventured an estimate of the attendance, one would need truly to have had divine inspiration to come up with a figure like 72,469. Furthermore, Witnesses do not stop at a mere reporting of the figures; various percentages and increases are computed. The increase of total attendance of the first day of the convention over the first-day attendance at the 1950 convention, to pick a convenient example of Witness statistical science, amounted to exactly 47,113.

The most amazing example of Witness statistics that I have seen, however, is the report of Witness activities for the year 1953. Two and one-half pages of closely printed figures are presented, informing us, among other things, that in the United States a total of 12,978,943 pieces of literature were sold during 1953, and that in Sierra Leone the Witnesses spent a total of 28,772 hours working for the "Society." Similar figures are given for countries all over the world, including such far-off places as Israel (21 Witnesses there), Senegal, Hong Kong, Okinawa, Southern Rhodesia and Swaziland. But the truly striking thing about these figures is that they could all have been published in the January 1, 1954, issue of *The Watchtower*—I received my copy a few days before New Year's Day. The accompanying article, it is true, sometimes refers to the "1953 service year," but no indication is given that this is different from the calendar year; more often than not, the article uses the phrase "during 1953" when discussing the figures.

These three typical proletarian mechanisms—irregularity, onion form and mystification—are indications of the proletarian's instability and his profound distrust of order. In the same way in which the proletarian's eschatology serves to place him outside the concerns of ordinary men, so do the proletarian organizational principles separate him from the responsibilities of everyday life. To have an orderly, rational organizational life within the proletarian movement would be self-defeating, for all the social responsibilities against which the proletarian revolts on the outside would then crop up right at home in the form of humdrum organizational housekeeping.



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The complete lack of inner order and organization, to be sure, frequently shows itself in very desperate attempts at precision and superb organization. The exactness in dates and in statistics illustrates this tendency; but this exactness is really all a house of cards —the figures which are later so carefully tabulated and manipulated with all the sophistication of modern statistical techniques are simply invented to begin with. And, thus, all the exaggerated efforts at achieving exact order merely result in compounding the disorder. The fanatic is typically doctrinaire: what are absolute certainties on the surface can hide the tremendous underlying uncertainties he feels.

As in all cases of an essential separation from the community's common sense, of course, proletarians find it necessary to make certain substantial compromises with reality. They run business enterprises, deal with money, come to temporary agreements and understandings with other social forces. But these compromises with reason—always relegated to the outer layers of the onion—are but subordinate parts of a larger pattern that is dominated by fanatical disorder and complete contempt for reason.

What has here been discussed as the principle of irregularity in proletarian organization is in many ways similar to what is technically known as "charismatic" leadership, an arrangement whereby leaders have followers not because of any formally acquired status, but because of a personal "gift of grace." A man like Father Divine is a good example of a charismatic leader. He is followed not for any tangible achievement or any special preparation; his followers, rather, attribute a very personal and extraordinary power to him—one that cannot be duplicated by anyone else. Charismatically led groups, through their rejection of institutional stability, are thus certainly irregular. But the question is whether it is necessary for all irregular groups—e.g., proletarian movements—to have charismatic leaders.

The classical interpretations have made a great deal of the personal importance of Hitler and Stalin in the totalitarian movements; some writers have even held that the worship of leaders constitutes the core of the totalitarian phenomenon, and that, once



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the totalitarian leader dies, the movement that has been connected with his name will necessarily crumble.

Quite aside from the fact of the post-Stalinist existence of communism—which by itself is enough to refute this view—it seems to me that one would seriously (and perilously) underestimate the social importance of proletarianism if one were to limit it to the reach of personal magnetism. Proletarian movements have found means—notably the apparatus of organization and esoteric ideology—of transferring the charm of the charisma from the person of the leader to the movement as a whole. As will be shown, it is certain social conditions and certain kinds of personalities that determine the existence of proletarian movements; the charismatic leader alone certainly does not.

While proletarian movements can exist without such personages, there is, nevertheless, a basic ambivalent attraction to charismatic leaders from within these movements. On the one hand, this type of leader threatens the very existence of the movement by his inescapable quality of being mortal; on the other hand, there is a great psychological need on the part of the proletarian for such a person. Jehovah's Witnesses—and apparently the Communists too —now have an arrangement whereby there is a charismatic leader in principle though not in practice. The name of Knorr is constantly mentioned in connection with all Witness activities, and he is spoken of as if he were the equivalent of the early leaders of the organization, who really did exercise charismatic powers. But when Knorr appears in public, Witnesses greet him with no more than a polite applause; his speeches are carefully read by him, and verbatim printed versions are distributed the moment he finishes. There is absolutely none of the real excitement that surrounded the early leaders, none of the ecstasy with which followers greeted Hitler.

The dilemma of needing a charismatic leader and not being able to afford one is the sort of thing Marx called an "internal contradiction"; it remains a source of potential crisis for any proletarian movement. How well a given group can deal with this danger depends in large measure on how much need there is for the move-



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ment within the society in which it functions. Where the surrounding society is well integrated, all the internal troubles of the proletarians have a tendency to multiply. Where the society is beset by forces of disintegration, the proletarian movement can overcome its own difficulties much more easily.

## III

It is interesting, finally, to look at the social and psychological origins of proletarianism.

It has been frequently noted that there is an adolescent quality about proletarian movements: there is a romantic selflessness that has contempt for the grownup's concern over economic security; there is an all-important "cause" whose internal life takes the place of family relationships. It does not surprise us, therefore, that youth movements—the organs of adolescent social revolt—are a prototype of all proletarian movements in psychological atmosphere and organizational structure. The untranslatable German word *bündisch* expresses these adolescent qualities; it is a term, interestingly enough, which the Nazis took over from the *Wandervögel.* If we had to summarize the psychological origins of proletarianism in a single phrase in English, that phrase would be "adolescence fixation."

If we borrow a term now from Durkheim, *anomie,* we also can identify the main social conditions that foster proletarianism: material insecurity, a lack of spiritual cohesion among the various elements that make up society, and a feeling that social disputes can no longer be arbitrated through a common governmental institution. Perhaps the most striking recent example of these conditions is the Weimar Republic, in which setting all proletarian movements flourished. The *Wandervögel* became a mass movement in the early days of Weimar; the Nazis grew spectacularly in the late twenties and early thirties (partly because they knew how to utilize *Wandervögel* traditions); and the German Communist party became the largest outside of Russia.

We may generalize, I believe, that both adolescence fixation and anomie are causal conditions for proletarian movements. Their



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relative importance seems to vary inversely. Where—as in England and the Scandinavian countries—anomie is at a minimum, the proletarian movements are small and are composed of individuals whose personal difficulties loom exceptionally large; where social anomie is dangerously acute—as it was in the Weimar Republic and is now in France and Italy—the rank and file of proletarian movements are not restricted to the emotionally disturbed. But even in these countries, we have evidence that the proletarian inner elites consist almost exclusively of perpetual adolescents.

I cannot close without warning that in actual life the proletarian cannot be as neatly distinguished from the non-proletarian as it might appear in this article. For the sake of simplicity, I have dealt mainly with groups in which proletarianism has been brought to an extreme; this is particularly true of Jehovah's Witnesses and of the totalitarian movements. But if we stop to consider that emotional immaturity comparable to that of adolescents is not restricted to members of proletarian movements, and that elements of anomie exist not only in Europe but also in this country (especially, I would say, in the South), it should not surprise us to find potential proletarian leaders and followers in a great many places indeed.

Ultimately, the roots of all proletarian movements lie in contemporary society. We might speak of the proletarian's desire to secede from the community, but we know that this desire is always conditioned by spiritual and material deprivations. The strength of proletarian movements within a country is a good barometer of the cohesion and permissiveness of its social structure. Instead of merely hating and despising these movements, we might take them as a challenge to reorder things so that none will need to take flight into proletarian fantasies.



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# Defense Means Protection

LEWIS A. DEXTER

BROADLY SPEAKING, WE HAVE IN THIS COUNTRY no grand strategy of defense. Defense means protection—for our basic war-making strength, our industry and our lives. We have provided effective measures of tactical defense for our air force and ground troops; we have given some thought to strategic defenses, once campaigns have been launched; but where is our grand strategy of protection?

In the past, great nations have had such a grand strategy. The British fleet, for at least two hundred and fifty years, protected the British people and industry from any serious threat of destruction. From Pepys to Admiral Lord Fisher, from Charles II to George V, the fleet served by design as a guarantee that England would still stand. For a considerably longer period of time, the Roman legionnaires on the frontiers made sure that the great metropolitan cities of the empire could not be attacked effectively by barbarian invaders.

The only grand strategy of defense which we now have in the United States is the grand strategy of *deterrence*. This means either that we hope we can frighten the enemy away by "massive retaliation"—if he does not get his punch in at our glass jaw first—or that we hope we can, by a well organized system of continental air defense, make the cost of getting his bombers through on target very high.

Informed estimates, however, are in complete agreement that continental air defense under present or probable future circumstances cannot prevent some bombers from getting through on target. General Hoyt Vandenberg estimated in 1951 that 70 per cent of an attacking enemy's planes could accomplish their mission. If a few score planes could get through and deliver atomic or

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hydrogen bombs, or if these bombs could be exploded in various other ways, *the greater part of the industrial productivity of the United States would be disrupted, and a very substantial number of us would be killed.*

There seems to be no real hope of using the air arm as a means of defending ourselves from air attack, except to make it very unpleasant for the attacker. The approach, most recently put forward by Mr. Finletter, that we should deter the Russians by saying "You can hurt us, but we can hurt you too," sounds as though it has much to recommend it. We say "You can kill a quarter of our people and destroy half of our war-making power. So what? We can kill as many of your people and destroy more of your war-making power."

But, by itself, this policy is essentially unrealistic. Obviously, as writers like Walter Millis have pointed out, we are not going to run the risk of all-out atomic war if the Russians decide to occupy all of Vienna or to seize Sweden's mineral resources, because we are too clearly aware of how they might retaliate. Presumably the Russians realize this. Is the bombing of Russian cities for the purpose of protecting Swedish resources worth provoking what could be the vaporization of Chicago or Detroit?

In any case, all our talk of retaliation leaves the timing up to the Russians. If they attack us, atomically, at the moment they choose, we shall answer back. But if they take the initiative, they can offset any advantages we may have, for in this kind of war, initiative is a tremendous value. It enables the attacker to exploit any weaknesses of his enemy. A vividly remembered recent experience serves to illustrate the point. If the Russians had attacked the cities that actually did give aid to areas damaged by hurricanes Carol, Edna and Hazel, they would have compounded the effect of their attack.

Of course, all plans for continental air defense ought to be, and probably are, under constant re-examination. Improvements in warning systems, interceptor devices, capacity of fighter planes, and similar means of protection are greatly needed. However, there is one grave limitation in all apparent plans for continental defense. They accept as a basic hypothesis that decisions will be



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made both instantaneously and correctly, allowing no margin for error. Yet a few seconds snafu or a few hours delay, such as that which occurred at Pearl Harbor, would give the Russians all the leading time they need for decisive destruction.

Inevitably, human nature being what it is, delays and blunders can take place. Folly in higher command was not abolished after Pearl Harbor; inefficient commanders, delays in communication, fatigue, failure to define responsibility, and such will remain with us. Thus, a system of protection which assumes that everybody will act correctly, quickly and wisely is not an effective shield. Any effective system of protection must allow a fairly large margin of error. This is a somewhat different situation from that which confronted the British navy for several generations. It is true that Admiral Lord Jellicoe, like several of his predecessors, "could lose the war in an afternoon" by a wrong decision; but at least that decision had to be a positive one. Jellicoe had to be taunted or cajoled into staking everything on an attack which might fail. He could not lose the war in an afternoon merely by inaction. The American continental air defense system may be ineffective simply because somebody *fails* to do something quickly enough. This is certainly not an argument against continental air defense. On the contrary, it suggests that there is a great need for discovering more nearly foolproof methods for defending the continent. Incidentally, one of the advantages a democracy enjoys over a totalitarian regime with ideological motivations is that in a democracy, it is much easier to plan a program which can anticipate folly and inefficiency at command levels.

There is another approach to the problem of real defense which may give us a large measure of protection, an approach which will not be invalidated by bungling or venality of normal proportions. This approach goes back to a basic, and usually overlooked, question: *Why are we unsafe?*

Note the formulation of the question. *Not*: Why can the Russians attack us effectively? *Not*: How many Russian planes can get through? How can we prevent them from getting through? These



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questions are vital, but they are secondary to that first asked: *Why are we unsafe?*

We are unsafe because (1) we are gathered in a few metropolitan concentrations; (2) we have developed an economy which is organized in terms of geographical specialization and division of labor; and (3) we have an elaborate network of communication and transportation, dependent on all kinds of delicate interrelationships, which underlies this system of geographical specialization and urban concentration.

By way of contrast: except by sheer luck, atomic warfare would not profit anyone trying to conquer the wandering Indians of South America who live off the countryside, have built no artifacts, no canals, railroads or factories. In other words, they offer no targets.

In China today the Communists have developed a mass army and guerilla techniques of warfare. They certainly would suffer from the devastation of some targets; but after an atomic attack, their basic military economy would continue to be more nearly capable of vigorous effective action than would ours.

Compared with today, towns in the United States in 1819 were relatively self-sufficient. They could keep going under their own steam for a long time. If Boston had been destroyed in 1815, Worcester, Nashua and Providence could have continued to feed, clothe, govern and even arm themselves with reasonable effectiveness. All over the eastern United States, small, deserted "furnaces" exist. These were once metallurgical plants which could provide locally some of the weapons of war. During the War of 1812, when the British occupied Washington, how many producers were left without needed guidance? Very few. Today, in the age of the telegraph, government contracts, railroads and airplanes, how many industries would find it possible to make their own decisions if Washington were vaporized? Yet even Washington does not provide indispensable machinery parts like Detroit, Chicago or Toledo, parts without which factory wheels all over the country would stop moving. To be sure, the Federal Civil Defense Administration in Battle Creek supposedly has plans for such an emergency, but the vast and sublime indifference of almost everyone to its efforts has meant that there are many holes in its program.



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Today urban specialization, this setting up of targets for the enemy to destroy, *is quite needless.* Nineteenth-century technology may have made the big city essential for big industry; the pasteurization of milk, the purification of water and the development of effective methods for sewage and garbage disposal made the big city livable for millions in the 1870-1900 period. The big city had for many an appeal which the smaller town did not have. For those to whom "variety is the spice of life," the city became the place to live. As most readers will realize, it is in the big cities that groups of like-minded people can find the supplies and companionship they crave. The scholar who needs a constant supply of new books, the medical researcher who must have a constant supply of new patients, the artist who simply seeks the company of his fellows—all these have for the most part flocked to the large cities.

But automobiles, airplanes, helicopters, the development of electricity and of natural gas pipe lines, telephones and the two-way radio—all mean that the big city is no longer a technological necessity or a unique source of social satisfactions. The advantages of a city, with the possible exception of certain economic advantages of seaport cities in handling heavy goods, are not now particularly great. In fact, traffic congestion and the difficulty of building heliports in large cities mean that from an economic standpoint a ring of smaller cities could do business more effectively than large metropolitan areas. The constant push to the suburbs, migrations to Florida and to smaller towns show that in terms of pleasantness and attraction the metropolitan cities "have had it."

There is now no economic or social need for us to stay collected like so many lambs ready for the slaughter. We can spread out and thus very much reduce the danger of being crippled or destroyed by the vaporization of a few target cities. This was recognized on paper by the President's National Dispersion Policy, announced in 1951, but there has been little attempt to put that program into effect. Among many reasons, one of the most important is our intellectual and imaginative failure to grasp the fact that there can be a grand strategy of protection. American children shoot their playfellows when they play wargames, but they devote little thought to shielding themselves. Grown-up Americans often protect them-



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selves from the reality of the current threat by thinking in terms of millions killed—sometime in the future—in Moscow or New York. While talking in such terms, they are indulging in political speculation without an uncomfortable sense of personal involvement and fate. No matter how learnedly they discuss the politics of the situation, they are exemplifying Riesman's description of political apathy.

The threat of war becomes immediate, however, if we start to plan the removal of our company or research project, or even work of literary criticism, from Boston or Washington to Canton, New York or Cumberland, Maryland. We will then no longer think of the threat in terms of science fiction. Moreover, the consequent uprooting creates a problem for any individual or family. I tried to persuade a friend who teaches literary criticism that it would be desirable for his and his children's safety to take a job which he had been offered at a small college some distance from a target area instead of remaining in the big city where he now works. His immediate response was, "Well, they have no library there that specializes in my field; I'd have to do without books or borrow them on inter-library loan, and that's a nuisance. People like you who try to get people to disperse are a menace." And his wife said, "Oh, I couldn't live in a small college town; I'm sure people gossip about you more there."

Of course, most people cannot automatically move to a town which is safely outside the target area. For the last two years I have been seeking suitable employment in fields in which I am capable, where I can be outside the target area. While I have heard of some forty or fifty attractive openings in the heart of target areas during this period, I have not been told of one in a relatively safe city or town. Individual situation-wanted advertisements do not meet this problem, because in many types of activity almost all desirable jobs are concentrated within target areas.

For individuals to move out, institutions and industries have to move out. The fact that a large number of people in every institution and industry is reluctant to think about moving means that dispersion is likely to be put off, even though it is thought to be desirable academically. It is ridiculous in terms of the national



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interest for some of our great technical research agencies to be in the heart of probable target cities. The men who work there cannot be replaced. However, even if these men can be persuaded to take themselves and their families out from under the gun, the schools and institutions which support them cannot afford the loss of plant and equipment involved.

So, for a dispersion policy to be effective, there must be compensations and inducements to the vital institutions, industries and people to duplicate their facilities or spread themselves out. Necessarily, such a program will cost a good deal of money, though probably less than an atomic armament, massive retaliation program carried to extremes. Certainly it would cost a lot less than the vaporization of big cities.

Nobody has appropriated any real money for a national dispersion policy yet. Aside from some pressure exerted on government contractors and the removal of the Federal Civil Defense Administration from Washington to Battle Creek, nothing significant has been done by anybody anywhere to promote dispersion. The problem is to determine who must be moved outside target areas, how this can be done, what sort of inducement shall be offered and where facilities need to be duplicated in case of destruction. In the *New Leader* of November 29, 1954, Congressman Richard W. Bolling and I discussed some of the inducements necessary to get industries and institutions to spread themselves out. Basically, however, what is needed is a careful investigation of these problems, the establishment of priorities and development of precise inducements. Congressman Bolling, in a resolution introduced into the House, asked that a Joint Committee on the Economics of Atomic Defense investigate these issues. Senator Humphrey has introduced a similar (though not identical) proposal in the Senate. Undoubtedly, such a Congressional exploration of the situation is imperative, but research by private institutions and agencies and by the executive departments is also to be hoped for.

Such research presumably should focus on issues like those just listed, but there are important additional ones. For instance, subsidization of the helicopter truck and bus industry might speed up materially the process of dispersal and make industrial spreading



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out very much more feasible; yet, so far, the federal government has been fairly timid about backing this industry. Similarly, the probable development of guided missiles with atomic war heads might change the problem of dispersal to some extent, just as the hydrogen bomb forced a radical revision in the early postwar industrial dispersion program which had assumed that everyone could move within the same market area. (The wider range of hydrogen-bomb destruction makes that assumption extremely dubious now.) Even so, we would be infinitely safer than we now are if the federal government had declared in 1946 that all new buildings must be outside the probable range of destruction of the atom bomb. If even this had been done, the Russian threat to us *now* would be far less than in fact it is.

Just as it would have been wiser in 1946 to take the development of superbombs into account as a possibility, so today it would be wiser to plan our programs of dispersion not only in light of what we know today's weapons can do to us, but also in view of what we may reasonably have to fear from those of tomorrow.

Perhaps, and this can never be answered certainly, tomorrow's weapons may really be "absolute." In the history of organized warfare, men have forever been discovering weapons which puzzled and horrified them until they discovered some way of circumventing or partly circumventing their effects. Greek fire and gunpowder and even the Yankee habit of shooting directly at a man as a target were regarded as the most wicked possible military developments. Some people thought Napoleon could not be resisted, and the West waited for the grandsons of Genghis Khan very much as a rabbit waits for a boa constrictor.

The scientists who popularized the notion of the "absolute" weapon were utterly unfamiliar with the history of warfare and of military doctrine and were appalled by their own brainchild. Those who report today that atomic blasts may upset the genetic structure of the human race had their forerunners in the fearful men who foresaw the railroad as forcing women to beget monsters or miscarry.

All the ills and dangers we fear today may come to pass, but they are certainly less likely to take place if we attempt to find out how



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grand strategy and military common sense may help us. Conceivably, it might be an argument against proposals which of themselves are unpleasant and disruptive to say, "After all, there is so little reason to hope, let's eat, drink and pass social security laws, for tomorrow we die." But, by and large, a program of national dispersion would permit us to catch up with twentieth-century technology.

Once we write off the dead hand of the past in the form of antiquated buildings and plants, city debts, obsolete roadways, and all the other things which keep us in cities, the spread-out population which is now possible could really enjoy life more. Almost every vital scientific research laboratory in a metropolitan university, for instance, could be rebuilt somewhere in the country and become a more pleasant and effective place to work. Once the difficulty of moving from one place to another is over, most scientists would find better living conditions for themselves. For one thing, they would rid themselves of the strain of traffic or the daily journey by public transit systems; for another, they could eliminate metropolitan noise.

"War," said Clausewitz, "is a continuation of politics." Defense and protection in twentieth-century America are also a continuation of politics in the widest sense—politics in terms of rural and urban redevelopment, national land use, helicopter transport subsidies, tax rebates and the like.

If the reader has noticed that this article was written before the most recent announcements about radiation effects and the superbomb, I would like to point out that this new information does not, of course, alter at all the general point that defense means or should mean protection. Nor, in fact, does it alter the arguments for much dispersal. It seems to be the case that there is still a substantial possibility of securing survival through building shelters for those fifteen to twenty miles beyond the point where the superbomb hits; but present expectations that each man will build his own bomb shelter involve a fantastic disregard of the advantages of mass production and co-operative action. However, there is at least a possibility that the best way to deal with the superbomb may be dispersal, on the one hand, for those who are not prime objects of



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enemy attack; and on the other, concentration for a small number of especially important military or productive factors—following in this instance the analogy of the castle town of the ninth century which served as a protection against viking sea raiders. Concentrations for particularly important factors might be rendered *especially* defensible in various ways, provided that the rest of the population and of industry did not seek the same degree of protection. But in the absence of information, such possibilities are to be regarded as speculations. A major point for consideration is that there is obviously good reason for concealing from potential enemies the weapons and techniques for attacking them. But is there any good reason for concealing from ourselves what we must do—on rather a large scale—to protect ourselves? Would we not be able to figure out much better what kind of defense would protect us, what degree of dispersal is necessary, what sort of concentration is possible, if we had the information and background for continuing and widespread analysis of the system of defense and protection? In other words, if defense means protection, and protection means public participation and co-operation, perhaps defense also means public access to knowledge about protection.



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# The Olympian Cowboy

HARRY SCHEIN

Translated from the Swedish by Ida M. Alcock

WHEN MIDDLE-BROW PEOPLE want to express their utter contempt for films, they often cite the "Western" as typical of the idiocy they wish to deprecate. Actually, the Western is the backbone, not the tail, of the art of the film.

The Western, for that matter, is much more than a film. It offers us the opportunity to experience the creation of folklore, to see how it grows and takes form. The roots of the mythology of Europe and the Far East are hidden in the past, and today can be only imperfectly reconstructed. But the white man's America is no older than the Gutenberg Bible. It attained economic independence and, therewith, cultural independence about the time the novel achieved its artistic and popular success. It is no accident that James Fenimore Cooper's work stands as America's first significant contribution to literature. It is just as natural that the film, at its very beginning, seized upon the Western motif. In the life span of less than one generation, it has developed from an apparently innocent, meaningless form into a rigidly patterned and conventional mythology, into one body of young America's folklore.

Of course, most of the Westerns of silent films were substantially sideshows performed by puppets. But somewhere between William S. Hart and Hopalong Cassidy, a change occurred. The simple, upright and faithful cowboy became more and more decked out with silver spurs and guitars; he sang much and drank little; he never

✪ Besides being a film critic for BLM, an outstanding Scandinavian literary magazine, HARRY SCHEIN is a chemist and president of one of Sweden's leading engineering firms. Mr. Schein, long a devotee of the cinema, claims to be the only film critic in the world who was caught by the police—and expelled from the Boy Scouts—for breaking into a movie theater. This claim to fame is based on a thirteen-year-old's determination to see "Frankenstein," reserved in Sweden "for adults only."



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worried about women even while protecting them. Almost imperceptibly he was changing into an omnipotent father symbol whose young attendants consistently avoided heterosexual and other traps of an unmanly nature.

The child is father to the man. The Western of the days of the silent film already contained the material and the tendencies which, little by little, as the element of sound consolidated the form of the film, were deepened and rigidified. Folklore demands a rigid form. If one is to feel the power of the gods, repetition is required. It is precisely the rigid form of the Western which gives the contents mythological weight and significance. This requires a ritualistic handling, with a rigid cast of characters similar to that of the *commedia dell'arte* and a strict orthodoxy like that of the Japanese Kabuki Theater.

Several years ago, when the Swedish state film censorship bureau wished to demonstrate the justification for its existence by showing what erotic and brutal shocks we escaped because of the intervention of the censor, it was found that these consisted to a great extent of saloon fights in the Westerns. The similarities among these fights, taken from perhaps ten different films, were astounding: the same bar counter, the same supernumeraries, the same groupings, the same choreography in the fights themselves. And when the Czech puppet-film director, Iri Trnka, decided to produce a satire on American films, it was natural that he chose the Western. It was simple enough to use puppets instead of human beings to make the rigid form and strict convention appear grotesque.

The movement in a stereotype is as obvious as the ticking of a clock in an otherwise absolute silence. The postwar shifts in perspective which the Western underwent did not disturb the mythological stability, but gave it a profound meaning aside from its aesthetic value. The genre has produced several good and many bad films, but even the stuttering priest can speak about God. Naturally, the Western does not lack aesthetic interest. Even in its role of nursery for American film directors it has a certain aesthetic significance. Moreover, the rigid form requires speed, action and movement, and, in propitious circumstances, can contribute to a dramatic



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conclusion. In addition, it creates an enormous demand for freshness within the limitations of the stereotype, an aesthetic stimulus as good as any.

Also characteristic of the Western is the public's relationship to it. The desire to experience the same thing time after time implies on the part of the public a ritualistic passivity similar to that which one finds in a congregation at divine service. It cannot be curiosity which drives the public to the Western; there is no wish for something different and unfamiliar, but a need for something old and well known. One can scarcely talk about escape from reality in the usual sense; it is a hypnotic condition rather than a complicated process of identification. The Western has the same bewitching strength as an incantation: the magic of repetition.

## *The Hero and Women*

In the center stands the hero. He is always alone in the little community. He often lacks family and, not infrequently, is one of those exceptional human beings who seem never to have had a mother. Opposed to him are the bandits (there are always several) and their leader, an older, rich, often to all appearances respectable man in league with corrupt political bosses. The bandit, too, usually lacks a wife and only now and then does he have an unfortunate daughter. Finally, there is the little community itself—respectable, timid and neutral in action.

The action often takes place in the period immediately after the Civil War. In such cases, the hero is often a Southern officer and his opponents are Northerners. The struggle between these two elements is an epilogue to the war, often with a reversed outcome. Uncle Sam is like a father figure, powerful and hateful, but at the same time filled with guilt feelings toward the ravished Southerners. Although the Western apparently takes revenge for the defeat of the South, the revenge is still illusory, a rebellious gesture which culminates in loyal submission and father-identification.

The hero is surrounded by a good woman and several bad saloon girls, who later either sing about love or dance the cancan. The



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good woman is usually a blonde and a specialist in making apple pie. The bad women are the kind one goes to bed with. Although the beds rarely appear in Western interiors, there is reason to assume that the saloon ladies are supposed to suggest those prostitutes who, during the enormous woman shortage of the eighteen-hundreds, were imported into the West and, through their kind actions, saw to it that not all the men shot one another to death. Of course, in more advanced films, the typical mixed-figure appears: an apparently bad woman who seems to be on the side of the bandits but who gradually shows herself to be innocent and finally helpful in their destruction.

The hero's relationship to women is very subtle. He shields them without actually being involved. In more and more Westerns a direct enmity toward women is displayed. Sadism is directed most often toward the bad women, but now and then even toward the mixed-type. "Duel in the Sun" offers the best example of this. Often a triangle drama appears (a woman and two men) which ends with the men becoming good friends and arriving at the realization that the woman is not worth having. In "The Outlaw," the young man, after prolonged abuse, humiliates the woman by choosing, in a tossup between her and a fine horse, the horse. In a priceless homosexual castration fantasy, the father figure of the film shoots off the ear lobes of the young man when he dares to defend himself. The pistol in Westerns is by now accepted as a phallic symbol.

In a series of films, the weapon stands in the center of the action—a bowie knife, a Winchester rifle, a Colt revolver. He who owns the weapon is unconquerable. The good men are the rightful owners from whom the bad men are trying to steal potency. To own the weapon is much more important than to own the woman. It is important how one draws the weapon. Bad men draw it too often but too slowly. Like Casanova, they shoot in all directions without finding their mark. The hero, who defends family and home—as an institution—draws his weapon quickly. He shoots seldom, but never misses. As protector of the community, he cannot afford to be promiscuous. There must be an outcome of the



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shooting. A strong man is able to fire six shots without reloading.

So much for the rigid Western pattern, familiar even to the more occasional moviegoers. It may be of interest to determine what variations this pattern displays and particularly those tendencies that have been most pronounced since World War II. The question, in other words, is this: Is there a relation between America's politically dominant situation in the postwar period and a new arrangement of luminaries in its mythology?

## *The Three Modern Variants*

Accepting the usual risks of generalization, one may speak of three basic elements in the Western: the symbolic, the psychological and the moral. If one bears in mind the fact that the Western is usually a mixture of these elements, it will not be too gross a simplification to discuss each of these factors separately.

It is said that Chaplin never had any inkling of his profundity until he began to read what various intellectuals wrote about him. Then he himself became intellectual. That is, of course, sheer nonsense. If, however, this kind of reasoning is applied to the symbolism of the Western, it probably has a certain correctness. In other words, the Western seems to have become conscious of its symbolic purport and, as a result of this consciousness, has become quite dreadfully symbolic.

That unconscious enmity toward women, formerly expressed more indirectly, with lipservice paid to chivalry while actions denoted inner indifference (placing on a pedestal always implies humiliation), now finds stronger and more direct expression. The hatred of women has become so obvious that it must give rise to speculation. Their ill-treatment in a physical and often purely sadistic sense is an increasingly common element not only in the Western but also in other American films such as "Gilda." "Winchester 73" is an outstanding example. "Colt 45" is a symbolic parody of this motif. Not only must the pistol be regarded from a symbolic point of view—it goes off with a louder bang than the rifle—but the villain in the film has a favorite position, teetering



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on a chair, half-sprawling, with his hands on his hips and the pistol profile following a naturalistic line. Even if this conscious smuggling in of symbols never can take in an artistically interested customs officer, it indicates an ambition to make more than a classical spectacle of the Western.

This ambition is made even clearer through the psychological element. Though Westerns are undoubtedly unpsychological for the most part, they have a predilection for dealing with the psychology of the villain. Even this is refreshing to an eye that yearns for some gray oases in the black and white desert.

Through trying to clarify the villain's behavior, the films muster a certain sympathy for him. He becomes a product of unfortunate circumstances, orphaned at an early age and brought up in a loveless milieu. He has, as a rule, suffered injustice and seeks revenge in a certain criminal but, in the deepest sense, forgivable way. Often, as stated before, he is a Southern officer whose home was devastated. The villain, of course, must die, but as a rule he dies happy, in a redeeming self-sacrifice through which the blessedness of the final kiss acquires a charmingly melancholy background.

These psychological efforts can give rise to important thematic rearrangements. A few years ago two films were made about Jesse James—a legendary Western figure who is well on the way to becoming America's Robin Hood. In one of these films, "The Great Missouri Raid," the James brothers are formidable enemies, but chivalrous supermen of steel, dutiful toward their mother. They are, of course, Southerners, and their enemy is a Northern general modeled after a hateful Gestapo type. The film is very well made, and belongs to the classical Western pattern. The other film, "I Shot Jesse James," seems more unpretentious. It concerns a man who shot his best—and oldest—friend in the back in order to obtain amnesty for himself and be able to marry a saloon girl (cf. Freud). The victim is the bandit sought by the law, the murderer the one who is protected by the law. The psychological complications caused by this rearrangement of boundaries between the territory of the villain and the hero are dealt with in two sections. The murderer is certainly free, but he is detested by public opinion. Even the girl



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is unkind enough not to trouble herself about him after the treachery which has been committed for her sake. The murderer, desiring to defy public opinion, accepts an offer from a traveling theatrical troupe to appear on the stage and show how he shot James in the back. In another part of the film, he forces a singer to render the ballad of the murder of Jesse James. Thus, as his crime is repeated again and again, the murderer returns to the mental scene of the crime and suffers an inner decay which leads to a new crime, this time unprotected by the law.

"I Shot Jesse James" is not the only Western which sets friend against friend. Very often the motif is family; now and then brother stands against brother, father against son. As a rule it is a woman who divides them. Something like Biblically elemental conflicts are deftly extracted from, or themselves extract, a taken moral stand. When form and conclusion are rigid, a fundamental moral problem can have some of the simple, primeval strength of the drama of fate, and thus prevent the repetitions from becoming mechanical.

These moral conflicts are undoubtedly the most interesting elements in the modern Western. They are evident in "The Gunfighter," a very fine film with far from ordinary psychological creativity, and in "High Noon," until now the genre's most outstanding artistic success.

"The Gunfighter" deals with a middle-aged and unglamorized gunman. No one in the entire West can handle a gun as he does. He is, therefore, challenged by all the young fighting cocks who wish to take over his reputation for being invincible. He is forced to kill them in self-defense. He flees from his home, but his reputation is swifter than his flight; he is always recognized and the killing is repeated time after time. Though he is fed up to the gills with it, there is always someone who will not leave him in peace. Finally there comes a man who draws the gun a fraction of a second more quickly than he. The gunfighter dies with what is almost relief, but at the same time he is filled with pity for his murderer: now it is *his* turn to take over this reputation as the



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foremost gunman of the West, his fate to kill and never to be able to flee from killing until he himself is killed.

The Western's moral problem revolves around the Fifth Commandment. One can understand that a country traditionally pacifist but suddenly transformed into the strongest military power in the history of the world must begin to consider how, with good conscience, it can take life. In somewhat awkward situations it is always good to take shelter behind the lofty example of the mythological gods.

I see "High Noon" as having an urgent political message. The little community seems to be crippled with fear before the approaching villains; seems to be timid, neutral and half-hearted, like the United Nations before the Soviet Union, China and North Korea; moral courage is apparent only in the very American sheriff. He is newly married; he wants to have peace and quiet. But duty and the sense of justice come first, in spite of the fact that he must suddenly stand completely alone. Even his wife, who is a Quaker and opposed on principle to killing, wishes to leave him, and only at the last moment does she understand that her duty to justice is greater than her duty to God. The point is, of course, that pacifism is certainly a good thing, but that war in certain situations can be both moral and unavoidable.

"High Noon," artistically, is the most convincing and, likewise, certainly the most honest explanation of American foreign policy. The mythological gods of the Western, who used to shoot unconcernedly, without any moral complications worth mentioning, are now grappling with moral problems and an ethical melancholy which could be called existentialist if they were not shared by Mr. Dulles.

## *The Suffering God*

This conscious symbolism, these psychological ambitions and moral statements of account give both color and relief to the mythological substratum. The anchorage in realism, for example, in the historical characters like Billy the Kid and Jesse James, or in the more and more ambitious and thoroughly worked out descriptions



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of milieux, contribute toward the creation of an impressive space before the footlights of the mythological scene. The native strength and possibilities of the Western are developed in the counterplay between American film production and American film critics. As witness thereof, take that farfetched but characteristic comparison between "High Noon" and "That Old Game about Everyman" of which Howard A. Burton is guilty in a recent number of *The Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television.* His puzzle certainly does not fit together, but one still discerns an Olympian landscape-model, the Rocky Mountains—saturated with divine morality. Even satires on the Western, such as Bob Hope's "The Paleface," indicate a growing consciousness of the genre's true function.

An awareness of the mythological element is thus found not only among talentless writers, but also among talented directors like George Stevens. According to a statement in the English film magazine *Sight and Sound,* he is reported to have expressed his desire to "enlarge" the Western legend and to have said that the pioneers presented in the Western fill the same role for the Americans as King Arthur and his knights hold in English mythology. In Stevens' film "Shane," that ambition is entirely realized. As a matter of fact, the film incorporates the complete historical development of the Western, including the protest against the father and the identification with the father. It is, to be sure, an imperfect attempt—but still an attempt—at synthesis of the classical pattern, enriched with the three modern variations: symbolic, psychological, moral.

A large and fertile valley in the West is ruled by a powerful and greedy cattleman. With the help of his myrmidons, he carries on a private war of attrition against a handful of farmers who are struggling to bring the grazing lands under cultivation. To one of these small farms, Shane comes, dressed in romantic garb of leather, cartridge belt and gun. He takes a job there, becomes good friends with the farmer, his wife and their twelve-year-old boy, Joey. Shane has a mysterious past; he has been a gunman who now is trying to begin a new and peaceful life. He manages, for the longest time, to avoid being provoked by the cattleman's hirelings, but the terror



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of the farmers becomes unbearable. When one of them is shot down by an imported murderer, the others are willing to give up and move away. No one dares to meet terror with terror. Then Shane takes off his blue work-clothes and puts on his old leather outfit. He gets out the gun which he hoped he had laid down forever, rides forth to the saloon and kills the murderer. He has tried to begin a new life, but he has not succeeded. He has killed again and must ride away to the unknown from which he came.

"Shane" cannot, from an artistic point of view, be compared with "High Noon," possibly because it has not an equally emphasized main point. It deals, as a matter of fact, with two motifs: Shane and the little family, and Shane and the community versus the dictatorial cattleman and his band. But the film is obviously strongly influenced by "High Noon." The tempo is equally slow and heavy with fate, the portrayal of the milieu equally penetrating. The action is one unbroken loading of a charge up to the climax. This is unusual for a Western, with its generally very rapid changes of scene.

Like the gunman in "The Gunfighter," Shane is the man marked by fate, he whom the gods set out to kill. The distance between him and Mr. Babbitt, the farmer, and the small-town dweller in "High Noon" is as great as the distance between Brooklyn and Korea. Only the woman lacks perception of the hovering air of fatefulness. She sees only what she can touch. Between Shane and her the atmosphere is tense with fear and eroticism, but only her husband can give her security.

The really original element in "Shane" is the relationship between Shane and the little boy, Joey. Joey cherishes a boundless, completely hysterical admiration for Shane, for his skill with the pistol. He himself is still not permitted to play with loaded weapons, but they occupy his imagination. He smacks his lips to imitate the sound of shooting; he catches sight of game without being able to press after it; he shoots imaginary enemies with imaginary bullets. His confidence in Shane is upset a trifle when Shane knocks his father unconscious. However, when the boy understands that Shane has not robbed his father of life, but only of potency (Shane wants



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to prevent him, less experienced in the art of shooting, from risking his life, and takes away his pistol), the boy identifies himself completely with Shane. He follows him to the saloon, witnesses the battle, and afterward takes leave of Shane, prepared to become his heir.

Shane, more than any other Western hero, is a mythological figure. This is partly because the film sees him so much through the eyes of Joey, looking upward. Shane's entry is as godlike as his exit; it is a higher being who comes, driven by fate-impregnated compulsion, to fulfill his mission. Shane is more than Robin Hood, more than Cinderella's prince. He is a suffering god, whose noble and bitter fate it is to sacrifice himself for others.

"Shane" is distinguished by a realism seldom worked out so thoroughly in Westerns. The film takes the time to portray the people in the valley, their everyday lives, their little festivities. A series of impressionistically bold details gives the production a sensitive and fine-grained texture. Its world is familiar and close to reality. Only Shane is alien. He is not Zeus who, disguised as a human being, visits the earth to cavort with its women, but an American saint, the cowboy who died in the Civil War and sits at God's right hand. He is a leather-bound angel with a gun, a mythological Boy Scout, always ready to keep the hands of true believers and the community unsullied by blood.

## *A Bloody Future*

As a rule, of course, it is meaningless to discuss the degree of individual vision behind a work of art or a film with a mythological purport. Mythology rests on a collective foundation which also includes the creative artist.

When creative vision is expressed in the form of satire, it has quite obviously freed itself from the mythological substratum, but at the same time it strengthens the existence of that substratum—a puppet show which does not concern itself with the obvious is a paradox. As far as the Western is concerned, Bob Hope and the Marx Brothers demonstrate a blasphemous emancipation. Large



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sections of the American public, through television's mechanization of the Western, have become surfeited with the genre. Since "Shane" is neither mechanical nor satirical, it ought to be reckoned as the first offspring, and, through Stevens' statement, the first "documented" offspring of the new vision.

The question remains: Is this newly awakened mythological vision going to sabotage mythology itself by dispelling the cloud which carefully used to conceal the summit of Olympus? It is not altogether certain, since vision in and of itself does not preclude piety. Probably, however, these films are going to have a more and more strongly motivated central idea, whereby the distance between the hero of the Western and the rest of its cast is going to increase in proportion to the square of its consciousness. Most interesting, though, will be the future attempts to cram more and more current morality into the mythological pattern. When Shane's little Joey grows up and gets ammunition, he is not going to lack a target worth shooting at.



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# POEMS

*by* JOSEPH FREEMAN

## *Two Poems for Irwin Edman (1896-1954)*

### *Earth, Sea and Sky*
### *1919*

Earth, sea and sky; the proud and patient stars;
The gradual rainbow with its flags unfurled,
These are but golden unrelenting bars
Upon the secret edges of the world;

We move in beauty and are touched to tears,
Wakened to wonder and made clean with peace,
But guarded by a thousand unseen spears
Like royal captives; there is no release.

The moments mutiny, the days rebel,
The passions clamor. Better to be still,
Seek long bright spaces for a magic spell,
Kiss lips across a tender book until

The last rains falling on the final leaves
Beat down the darkness on the broken sheaves.

### *In Memoriam*
### *1954*

Platoons of dogma raid our zone,
We follow the fighting house to house;
Each gunner is Napoleon



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Stomping his foe, Dostoyevsky's louse.
The magic lamp has spent its force,
Aladdin too is dodging shells;
The plane exterminates the horse
And Cain survives these miracles.
We've heard the gospels, read the tracts,
Grown cautious in this recurring scene;
Pitiless, face the pitiless facts:
What are we now and where have we been?

Quicker, quicker clicks the clock;
Death has kidnapped one more friend;
The lights blow out along our block;
We know and doubt and resist the end
Until it trips us unaware;
Meet me, comrade, there below
The golden green Elysian stair
Where Charon's immortal waters flow;
Across, we shall resume our walks,
Once more young and confident;
I'll tell you about the Rappallo Talks,
You'll tell me what Dewey and Plato meant.

Vain metaphor! We know and doubt
And still resist the pitiless pain;
You cannot hear my broken shout,
I shall not see your face again;
But in this darkness there is light
Because you passed among us once;
The truth you taught us, and the right,
Outlives the dictatorial dunce;
Platoons of dogma cannot kill
The laughing wisdom that was yours;
Its temple on the simple hill
Outlasts the conceited murderous bores.



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Farewell, then! We may join you soon;
But others, confident and young,
Shall turn this nightmare into noon
And climb the sky that Whitman sang;
And those to whom you passed the torch
That Homer and Isaiah lit
Shall raise their own triumphal arch
Upon whose crown your name will sit;
While angry leopards came and went
You held the garden of thought and art,
And this shall be your monument
Forever high in the reverent heart.

*by* ROSE BURGUNDER

## *The Eve of Capricorn*

Forever the eye of the sea
Lord torn of meridians
Masting the white sand's image
At midnight, Hell's Heaven Eye, guardian
Of tides arrayed in her summerfall kings
Who broken brim-tossed laughed
For the shore's brief baubles,
Gone, nor sign nor scepter stay
O early dark

Liege earth shadows, shy in the sun
The vermilion spilling November sun
Unleafed at the last autumn star,
By gull told winter-clocks armor the air's
Descent, clamping their
Iron legs ironwings
Ironmouths over the moon . . .



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In the long dark, treason
Of time, day's demon, known
Moonlash dungeoned
Blue tongue of dawn
Thonged under the sea rim in dream buckled
Horns, wrung ravening rocking
Roaring in temple-false
Serpents of memory rising
The catafalque tide,

Nightsand, softer than naked nun
Slips on petticoats, sea silk, one
By one, unshrouds her innocent ears
Buries shell heart with a sinner's care
And woman wakes to hold on her
Sea breast beachbreast
Sundiamond swelled, the noon.

*by* LOUIS SIMPSON

## *Sleeping Beauty*

Where is your lady
When she's sleeping
With the pale charms
Of stillness on?
She walks with Helen,
Perhaps, and Thais—
Where is she now,
The vanished one?

The calm and quiet
Of sleeping faces



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Is like the silence
Of Babylon,
And she may wander
The strange world under
With many a pale
Companion.

Her star enchantments
Are strong and holy,
Her far enchantments
Are weird and wan—
And only music,
Immortal music,
Will reach your lady
Where she has gone.

## *Early in the Morning*

Early in the morning
The dark Queen said,
"The trumpets are warning
There's trouble ahead."
Spent with carousing,
With wine-soaked wits,
Antony drowsing
Whispered, "It's
Too cold a morning
To get out of bed."

The army's retreating,
The fleet has fled,
Caesar is beating
His drums through the dead.
"Antony, horses!
We'll get away,



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Gather our forces
For another day. . . ."
"It's a cold morning,"
Antony said.

Caesar Augustus
Cleared his phlegm.
"Corpses disgust us.
Cover them."
Caesar Augustus
In his time lay
Dying, and just as
Cold as they,
On the cold morning
Of a cold day.

*by* MARCIA NARDI

## *News from Our Town*

He had not lived long in our town
But those who never knew him closely
Knew closely those who did—
So that his death
Of the night before through every door
Had by the next night crept.

There was no dog whose bone
Lacked meat upon it, no cat whose bowl
Lacked cream,
And every lawn for days to come
Had crumbs for robins,



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And every ear long deaf
Heard how the sweetest bird of all
Sang when the sun had set.

Before one worm had brushed him,
While still his limbs were neat
As seeds in packages,
Out of his death no sooner had it reached
Each home, there marvelously leaped
That marvelous flower of which each leaf
Is a human heart perfected—

Wives that had long been neglected
Had arms around them, the idler of our town
Had kind words said about him,
Our drunkard was defended,
And letters unanswered from parents far away
Were suddenly remembered.

But he took his death,
When they placed him underground—
He took his death with him.
He needed his death no doubt for his new living
And for the spinning
Of other flowers,
Because the first before a week had passed
Was gone . . . its leaves pulled off
Its petals torn,
While every dog whose bone
Would tease *our* hunger, and our women grown
Too fat or thin or old
For arms around them—
Oh all for whom our thrushes' songs
Are sung—await now
Another death to mend it.



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## *The Poets*

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✪ ROSE BURGUNDER holds degrees from both Wellesley College and the Johns Hopkins University. Another of her poems, "Penny-Wise," appeared in the Summer, 1954, issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

✪ LOUIS SIMPSON is an instructor of English at Columbia University. He has published poetry and reviews in leading periodicals. A selection of his poems entitled *Good News of Death and Other Poems,* several of which first appeared in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, will be published by Scribner's in September.

✪ The poems of MARCIA NARDI have appeared in *Commentary, New Directions, Poetry* and *Botteghe Oscure.* A volume of Miss Nardi's poetry will be published by the Swallow Press in the fall of this year.



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# Can These Stones Speak?

WILLIAM CROFT DICKINSON

WE HAD GATHERED ROUND THE FIRE in the Smoking Room of the University Club. Outside it was a raw, wet day with a laggard fog, and there was every inducement to linger in the enjoyment of an easy chair, a cheerful fire, and the pleasure of good company. Moreover, the talk had turned to the interesting subject of coincidence.

"In my own case," said Robertson, taking up the talk, "the queerest coincidence I can remember came with a telephone call. I had left the Mathematical Institute fairly early, intending to come here to read the papers before lunch. By pure chance I had turned eastward in Chambers Street, so that my way took me by the more roundabout route over the North Bridge and along Princes Street, and there, again by pure chance, I suddenly decided to drop into Purves' to buy myself a new pipe.

"Almost as soon as I had entered the shop, however, one of the assistants came up to me to say that I was wanted on the telephone. Now that, you'll admit, was strange; for no one knew of my sudden impulse to buy a pipe. How then could I be wanted on the telephone?

"Well, to be brief, I went to the telephone at the back of the shop, only to find that the call *was* for me and (and here comes the queerest part of it all) the caller had been put through to Purves', instead of to the Mathematical Institute, by *a sheer mistake* on the part of the operator."

Robertson paused impressively. "And I should say," he continued, even more impressively, "that in Edinburgh the mathemati-

✪ This story by WILLIAM CROFT DICKINSON, professor of Scottish history and palaeography at the University of Edinburgh, is the first piece of fiction to be published in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. It is a selection from *The Sweet Singers*, published in Edinburgh by Oliver and Boyd in 1953.



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cal chances of being given a wrong number, and a particular wrong number, just at the time when a particular individual is present to answer the call at that particular wrong number, must be, let me see . . ."

"Yes, yes," put in several of us at once, for Robertson's informal lectures on the theory of probability were well known. "An extraordinary coincidence! The chances against it happening must be enormous."

"And yet," came the quiet voice of Henderson, our medieval historian, "I can tell you of an even stranger coincidence—if that is the right word—and one also connected with a call on the telephone, but one which I think even Robertson will admit is beyond all reckoning."

Something that would defeat Robertson's mathematical genius seemed likely to be a "tall story," but we sat back indulgently, ready to listen. It was a day for listening to stories.

"As you know," began Henderson, "the University Court of one of our sister universities has long made a practice of purchasing old and historic houses within the town which, after careful restoration and the sympathetic addition of modern conveniences, it makes available as residences for the members of its staff. Thus the University, in addition to acting as an energetic Ancient Monuments Board for the town, also exercises a maternal care for its supposts and provides them with lovely and interesting houses at rents within the reach of an academic purse. And in one of these lovely old houses (called "The Monal"—and the name was later to prove significant) lived my good friend, Alexander Lindsay, the University Librarian.

"At the time the Lindsays moved into their new, or perhaps I should say their old, house I had been making regular visits to the University Library in order to transcribe one of its manuscripts; and I well remember the excitement with which I was shown over "The Monal" and asked to admire its fine ceilings and fireplaces, the thickness of its outer walls, the sweep of the staircase, and (at the



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special prompting of Mrs. Lindsay) the splendid way in which the domestic quarters had been rearranged, and a bathroom and a cloakroom installed.

" 'And it isn't haunted?' I asked, playfully.

" 'Well, if it is, we haven't noticed it yet,' was Lindsay's laughing reply.

"The manuscript upon which I had been working (and this is not wholly unconnected with my tale) was a local account of local affairs at the time of the Reformation. It was an excellent account and, to my mind, almost as valuable as the well-known *Diurnal of Occurrents*. It contained, for example, a detailed description of the skirmishing between the army of the Congregation and the French forces of the Queen Regent; and it had a graphic relation of a visit and a sermon by John Knox, followed by the 'purging' of the local 'monuments of idolatry'. But the Lindsays had moved into "The Monal" just about the time when my work on the transcript was coming to an end, and as a result I was out of touch with them for about a year.

"Then came Lindsay's letter—reproaching me for not having visited them, reporting an interesting manuscript discovery, and making a strangely guarded offer of hospitality for any weekend I might choose. Lindsay, it appeared, had been making a new catalogue of the manuscripts in the University Library, and had discovered several folios of a burgh court record which fell within the period of my own particular manuscript but which, having been bound up with a lawyer's collection of styles and statutes, had hitherto escaped notice. 'There are one or two entries which will interest you almost as much as they interested us,' ran his letter; and then came some such sentence as this—'We will gladly put you up for any weekend next month, though I should warn you that we can offer only the "pillared room," and this house, it appears, is not without its ghost, and a ghost, moreover, that can now be identified.'

"Naturally I replied at once, accepting their kind invitation (with some light remarks about the ghost), and a fortnight later—on a Friday night in June—I was making my way toward "The



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Monal" through the cobbled streets and narrow wynds of the town.

"The Lindsays were delighted I had been able to come and, after the usual greetings, Lindsay himself escorted me to my room. I looked round it with interest but, to my casual glance, the 'pillared room' revealed nothing unusual apart from two massive stone piers complete with their capitals, which had been built into one of the walls and which were clearly of much earlier date than the house itself.

" 'So this is the haunted room?' I said.

" 'Yes,' he replied. 'But I'll tell you about it later. There's a meal waiting for you downstairs, so don't spend too much time knocking on the walls or looking for secret passages. The bathroom is just across the landing.' And with that he was gone.

"During dinner neither the room nor the ghost was mentioned and, after coffee, Lindsay at once invited me into his study to look at the newly discovered burgh records.

" 'Here's the manuscript,' he said, handing to me a heavy quarto. 'I'll confess I've broken every library rule by bringing it here, but you'll find the burgh records at the very end—the last ten folios.'

"I took the volume eagerly and, turning to the end, found there a number of folios in a typical clerk's hand of the sixteenth century and with the usual rubrics of a burgh court:

> Curia burgi de S. tenta ibidem in pretorio ejusdem per Alexandrum Bannerman et Johannem Blar ballivos dicti burgi. . .

" 'The most interesting entries are those under the dates 17 November 1573 and 20 April 1574,' he continued.

"It did not take me long to find the first entry to which Lindsay referred, and at once I realized the reason for his own interest in this record of the past. Couched in the legal phraseology of the time, I read that the Nunnery, which had been 'unoccupeit sen it was last purgeit' was now 'much decayit and abil hastilie to fal doun,' and that therefore the provost, bailies, dean of gild and town council had given permission to Andro Black, mason, to 'tak the stanes thairof' at the 'sicht of the dene of gild' for the 'bigging' of a house on that piece of land . . . and thereafter followed the 'gate'



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and the boundaries of the land to east and to west.

"I looked up and caught Lindsay's eye.

" 'That's your house, all right,' I said. 'The boundaries are quite definite. That is, if Andrew Black did take the stones and build.'

" 'Oh, he took the stones, right enough,' Lindsay answered, 'and he built. Hence "The Monal," in which you can now recognize the Latin *moniale*, or nunnery. But read the other entry, for 20 April 1574, and then you'll see why we have a ghost.'

"Quickly I turned the leaves to the entry for 20 April 1574. But this time the passage I was meant to read lay not in the formal record of the sitting of the court, but in a scribbled memorandum made by the clerk at the foot of the page. And there, in a couple of lines, the clerk had noted that 'intimation' was to be made to the minister anent the bones found by Andro Black between the north wall of the Nunnery and two of the pillars there.

" 'You see what that implies?' queried Lindsay.

" 'You mean that Black had come across the remains of a nun who had been immured?'

" 'I'm afraid so. For although part of the north wall and some of the piers are still standing in the ruins of the Nunnery, it would appear that Black did not hesitate to use at least two of those self-same piers and part of the wall. In fact he seems to have used them for one of the walls of your room, and the stones and piers he used must have been those where the remains were found. The bones of an immured nun never troubled that thrifty builder. But they seem to have troubled our last two visitors, both of whom slept in your room.'

" 'Queer sounds?' I asked.

" 'Yes. Nothing serious. Just a faint insistent knocking that defies identification and that gradually grows fainter and fainter until it dies away.'

" 'Well, that doesn't sound too bad,' I replied. 'And I'm quite ready to sleep in your pillared room. A ghostly tapping will be a new experience, and especially so now that I know the whole history of the knocking ghost.'

" 'Good,' answered Lindsay. 'I had an idea you would be inter-



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ested; though naturally I thought it best to word my letter as carefully as I could.'

"We left the study and joined Mrs. Lindsay in a small drawing room that overlooked a long, restful garden similar, I thought, to that of the house in St. Andrews where the ill-fated Mary Stewart was said to have drawn her own bow in an archery contest with one of the douce citizens. As we entered, Mrs. Lindsay said the one word—'Well?'

" 'Well it is,' I replied. 'Your spectre seems to be no more than a knocking on the wall; and I'm ready to listen to most things once.'

" 'That's all right then,' she answered. 'But neither Sandy nor I could be absolutely sure. And although this seems a big house, actually the pillared room is the only room we can offer to our guests.'

"Our talk drifted to other topics, and for a while the pillared room was 'clean forgot.' But about half-past eleven, when I rose to retire for the night, Mrs. Lindsay gave me a quick, questioning glance.

" 'It's all right,' I assured her. 'Tomorrow you shall have my own version of the knocking nun.'

"As I slowly undressed, I wandered round my pillared room examining its walls, and aimlessly testing here and there the paneling or stone. For when the house had been taken over and restored by the University, the plaster had been stripped from the walls and replaced by some lovely old paneling which ran all round the room, save on the one side where the two piers with the stone wall between them stood uncovered and bare. 'Strange,' I remember murmuring to myself, 'it almost looks as if the workmen themselves knew the story of the nun immured.' And with that, I climbed into my bed, switched off the bedside lamp and, untroubled by midnight fancies, was soon fast asleep.

"What first awakened me I cannot say. Indeed I cannot say whether I was awake, or whether all that followed was merely a dream. All I can tell you is that, awake or dreaming, I heard *the noise*. To call it a knocking would be misleading. Rather it was a



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steady scrape and tap-tap exactly similar to the sounds a blind man would hear were he to stand by a bricklayer at work. And the pauses were the same—the same scrape of the mortar gathered up, the same tap-tap on the brick to seat it firmly in its place, and then the same scrape of the trowel to remove the mortar from the outer face of the wall. So it went on: scrape, tap-tap, scrape. But brick by brick? No! With a sudden surge of horror I realized that I was listening stone by stone to the immurement of the nun; listening to a grim entombment of the living flesh, conjured up from some dark shades beyond the fathoming of man. And as that harrowing noise went on I felt my nerves beginning to give way. That inexorable scrape, tap-tap, scrape, which meant so much and yet which left so much more to be imagined, was too horrible to be endured.

"Then, just when my nerves seemed stretched too far, a bell began to ring, sharp and shrill. Strangely enough, the new and wholly different sound seemed to bring immediate relief: partly, perhaps, because it took my mind from that other and more awful sound; partly, perhaps, because I realized that although the bell was ringing somewhere in the house, it was not ringing within my room. Urged by some impulse which it is impossible to explain, I slipped out of bed, made for my bedroom door, opened it, and felt my way on to the dark landing outside. The bell was ringing downstairs—strident, persistent, demanding immediate answer. And suddenly, all at once, I realized it was the telephone. The telephone and nothing more. But, instead of the normal double-ring and pause, the bell was ringing continuously as though its summons were too urgent to allow for any intermission.

"Moving as quickly as I could in an unfamiliar house, I descended the stairs and felt for the table on which I had noticed the telephone when I first arrived. I took up the receiver and at once the ringing ceased. Bending down, I said, 'Yes. This is Dr. Lindsay's house.'

"But through that instrument came no normal and reassuring voice. Instead there came the sound of a voice, far distant or strangely muffled, intoning some phrases in measured and sonorous Latin. Then came recognition! I was listening to the concluding



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dread sentences of an excommunication: *'And as this candle is now extinguished so may her light be extinguished before Him who liveth for ever and ever. May her soul be sunk in the nethermost pit of Hell ever there to remain. So be it. So be it. Amen.'*

"Again so much was heard but so much more was left to be imagined. Nor did the horror end there. For, as my mind took in that awful scene, there came through Lindsay's telephone a sound such as that which might be made by many candles dashed to the ground and so extinguished, followed at once by the slow tolling of a bell, deep-toned and relentless.

"Had I really *heard* that grim echo from the past? Had those sounds really come to me through the telephone in my hand? Fumbling to replace the receiver in the dark, I dropped it on the table, and there I let it lie. I stood trembling, my lips still repeating the closing sentences of the excommunication, my ears still ringing with the tolling of the bell. I turned, and struggled painfully back upstairs, only to halt, with renewed fear, as I reached the threshold of my room. Suddenly, I felt cold, bitterly cold, and I realized that I was shivering from head to foot. I must get back into my bed at any cost! With something between a stumble and a rush I reached my bed and hastened to draw the blankets round me—and perhaps over me! But somehow they seemed perverse and obstinate, and I was shivering more violently than ever. I sat upright in my bed and strove to gather the sheets and blankets into some sort of order. And then I felt the wind! It was blowing hard outside, almost a full gale, and strong gusts of wind were beating upon me from the open window. I was certainly awake. Awake, and sitting up in bed; holding the blankets in front of me, and shivering with cold.

"Had I dreamed it all? Time to think over that later. Quickly I slipped out of bed and across the room to shut the window. And there was *the noise* again! Scrape, tap-tap, scrape. For a second I stood paralyzed. But now came an overwhelming surge of relief. The scraping noise came from the window—the catch was giving slightly to and fro with each gust of wind; and the tap-tap came from something loose outside, something that was tapping against the window, likewise with every gust of wind. So *that* explained it



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all! I shut the window and went back to my bed, calling myself every kind of fool. But just before a refreshing dreamless sleep intervened I remember asking myself, 'But what of that telephone call? How does *that* fit in?' "

Henderson leaned back in his chair, and the tension relaxed. Yet before any of us could speak he continued:

"I said there was a coincidence, however; and here it is.

"We were having breakfast next morning and I had just finished the story of my dream.

" 'How horrible!' exclaimed Mrs. Lindsay. 'What an awful night!'

" 'Not a nice dream, by any means,' added Lindsay. 'Yet it fits in with all the usual theories. We had been discussing the immurement of the nun and Andrew Black's use of the piers and the stones. It only needed the scrape of the window-catch and that tapping noise —and there's your dream.'

" 'All of it?' I asked quietly.

" 'Why? . . . What? . . . What do you mean?' asked Lindsay.

" 'I suppose it's only an adjunct to the dream,' I answered, 'but somehow or other I can't fit in that telephone call. Why should I dream that? The continuous ringing of the telephone bell, instead of the usual short double-ring and pause; the concluding sentences of the excommunication; and then the extinction of the candles and the tolling of the bell. There could be no association of ideas there. We had not mentioned excommunication, and the thought of excommunication had never occurred to me.'

"A slight cry escaped Mrs. Lindsay, and she put her hand up to her mouth.

" 'Why, my dear . . .' began Lindsay.

" 'I've just remembered,' she said, almost in a whisper, and with a startled look in her eyes. 'When I came in to prepare the breakfast this morning, I noticed the telephone receiver was lying on the table, and I replaced it. I wondered then who had left it like that. But *in your dream,*' she continued, turning to me, 'you fumbled with the receiver, you dropped it on the table, *and you left it there*!'

"And as the three of us sat at the breakfast table, each battling



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with the impossibility of every strange surmise, a bell rang, sharp and shrill.

"I think we all jumped, involuntarily. But it was only the bell of the front door. The bell rang again. Mrs. Lindsay rose to answer it, and, as she left the room, she left the door ajar. We heard her open the front door, and we heard a voice:

" 'Good morning, ma'am. I'm from the Post Office. Your telephone wire is down. Came down in the night with the wind. But we'll soon connect you again. The men are on the job now, though there's a fair stretch of it to be repaired.'

"There was a murmured reply from Mrs. Lindsay. Then the voice began again:

" 'No! It won't be a big job. But it's queer the way it came down. You won't believe it ma'am, but the wire from your house was blown clean off its course; right across the ruins of the old Nunnery; and queerer still, it was coiled there so tightly round one of the old pillars by the north wall that we had quite a job to get it free again.'

"I looked at Lindsay, and our eyes met. *Trailing across the ruins of the old Nunnery, coiled round one of the piers so tightly that it could hardly be released.*

" 'And that's the explanation of your tapping noise,' said Lindsay, striving to sound as matter-of-fact as he could. 'I wondered what could be loose outside your window. And of course it was the telephone wire. It's connected to that corner of the house.'

"I didn't answer, and I had a shrewd suspicion that Lindsay didn't expect me to.

"Then, literally, I could see him pulling himself together. 'And I suppose a broken wire like that might easily lead to some kind of short-circut which would give a continuous ring. That's possible, isn't it?'

"Still I didn't answer him, and still he persisted. 'Yes, it all fits in now. Just a dream, my friend, just a dream. A damned bad one, I'll admit. And this business of the wire stretching across the ruins of the old Nunnery, and tightly coiled round one of the remaining columns there, is simply a strange coincidence. Coincidence and



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nothing more. After all, haven't we all rather jumped to conclusions about those bones found by old Andrew Black? There's nothing to prove they were the remains of an immured nun. And would a sentence of excommunication be pronounced before or during an immurement? More than that, is there a single recorded instance in Scotland of the immurement of a nun?' "

Again Henderson moved in his chair.

"I didn't answer him," he continued. "I didn't ask him how he would explain that telephone receiver which Mrs. Lindsay had found still lying on the table. I didn't ask him if that also was a coincidence. More than that, I'm certain he was relieved that I didn't ask. Perhaps there are some questions it is better not to ask. Perhaps there are some experiences into which we should not inquire too closely. And perhaps because of that, I have never sought to know whether a sentence of excommunication *would* be pronounced at the time of the immurement of a nun."



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# A Little Faith, A Little Envy:

## *A Note on Santayana and Auden*

GERALD WEALES

IN THE PROCESS OF REVIEWING George Santayana's *My Host the World* for the *New Yorker*, May 2, 1953, W. H. Auden extends his remarks into a general statement about Santayana and belief. Odds should have been with Auden in any contest between the two. He is, after all, clothed in the strength of his relatively new belief, and the Santayana that he deals with is the somewhat garrulous, sometimes picayune author of the last of the autobiographical volumes, and only by occasional implication the philosopher of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* and *Realms of Being*. But no real encounter ever takes place; it becomes apparent after the first few paragraphs that Auden will, as he so often does, talk about himself.

The greater part of the review treats that quite irrelevant matter —Auden's dislike for Santayana. It is easy to be in sympathy with Auden, for Santayana can be annoying as he walks through the world, picking and choosing persons and places as though he were furnishing a sitting room and with just the degree of emotional involvement that such a chore demands. It is obvious that he has preferences in friends—Stanley Russell—and in places of residence—Rome. Yet when the friendship with Russell wears itself out, he appears to be suffering more from regret for a comfortable relationship that has gone than from the sadness that Auden finds in his description of those last days. Santayana so withdraws himself from those with whom he associates that he becomes merely an observer, incapable of meeting the demands that a deep personal

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relationship would make. He is even less capable of a social or a political loyalty or allegiance, a fact that he makes quite clear as he explains why he did not let himself be trapped by Robert Bridges' insistence that he should stay in England because the English needed what he had to say. Auden is particularly irritated that this book, which covers the years between 1912 and 1942, should do no more than mention the two world wars and should completely ignore the other political happenings—such as the Spanish Civil War—which are generally considered the major events of that period. Each of us, depending upon the degree of his social involvement (and it would take a Santayana not to be involved), finds this attitude of Santayana's wrong, the wrongness covering a spread from unpleasant to criminal. Irwin Edman, who was more sympathetic to Santayana, reviewing the same book for the New York *Times*, calmly pointed out that "he will inevitably reveal the littleness that limits the largeness of his vision, and the lack of sympathy that makes him indifferent to the fate of his contemporaries and his world." So we understand Auden's statement, "You know, I don't think I really like him"; yet, as Santayana would never say, but as his whole philosophy implies—so what? The validity of his philosophic position certainly does not depend on Auden's liking him, nor on whether or not he takes the trouble to notice a world political situation which has made life increasingly difficult for the past two decades.

Auden is operating on more relevant ground when he attempts to take those facets of the philosopher's personality which he dislikes and to extend them into an explanation for Santayana's scepticism. He draws a picture of a Santayana who is too fastidious, too genteel, too much of an old maid to get his hands dirty by grasping a good honest dogma, too much afraid that the dogma will be false and he will be caught in public error. Santayana would be the first to admit, although not perhaps in those terms, that there is some truth in this explanation. He says in *Scepticism and Animal Faith*: "It was the fear of illusion that originally disquieted the honest mind, congenitally dogmatic, and drove it in the direction of scepticism." Auden, in his interpretation, then, is saying no more than Santayana has admitted often enough before, and the



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tone of his statements tends to reveal more about Auden than it does about Santayana.

There is nothing wrong with Auden's interpretation of Santayana's personality; his error lies in the use of dogma. There appear to be at least two kinds of dogma in the world—that of the absolutist, of the Catholic or the Communist, for instance, which is not only right for the believer, but for everyone else, and by which everyone else must be judged; and that of the relativist, which is suitable for him, though perhaps for no one else, and makes him operative in the world. Auden's new Christianity appears to be nearer the first. He admits that he has seen the light and that those who have not yet seen it are in darkness; he is kind enough, however, to promise not to torture anyone into believing his truth. Yet *his* truth, he implies, is *the* truth. Thus when he attacks Santayana's statement that possessions are a burden by saying that "it is only through such possessions that most men can learn loyalty and responsibility," he is positing those two qualities as virtues, not only for himself, but for Santayana, whose dogma has just allowed him to reject them. Auden is obviously not really concerned with whether or not Santayana is or ought to be dogmatic, but with the fact that Santayana's scepticism allows him at the same time to accept and reject the Christian dogma by treating it as myth.

Santayana's is an operative dogma which allows him to come to terms with his material surroundings, since he accepts matter through animal faith, while he refuses, as a sceptic, to accept the final truth of his belief. "My dogmatism asserts that, in an observable biological sense, knowledge is possible, and on the same biological grounds, that knowledge is relative," he says in "Apologia Pro Mente Sua." Here, too, he tries to correct the misapprehension that equates scepticism with disbelief; he says that the sceptic "would not be a sceptic if he pretended to have proved that any belief, much less all belief, was *wrong*." And in *My Host the World*, he repeats much the same thing: ". . . the movement of my mind among various systems of belief has tended merely to discover how far my vital philosophy could be expressed in each of them." This expression is implemented by the recognition or the intuition of



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essences within these beliefs; the essences, as he seems to say in *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, become ideas, separated both from the accident of existence and from the experience of the perception of them. This would appear to be an attempt to free the essence of the illusion of truth dependent upon an immediate situation, to place it so that its moral or aesthetic quality may be recognized. But finally, his decision as to the goodness or the badness of the essence lies within his mind, is subjective. When he begins to find his divine essences temporarily in material or human associations, Auden asserts that "none of us has a right to frown on Santayana for being episodic in his affections for persons or places, but one has a right to object to the platonic window dressing." Certainly Santayana would not mind his objecting, but he might be amused at his assumption that he has a "right." Santayana also says, in *My Host the World*, "Only for me transcendentalism was a deliberate pose, a way of speaking, expressing a subjective perspective." Santayana has his dogma certainly, and it involves the recognition of and the delight in certain essences; but as a sceptic, he knows that this dogma is merely his own myth, no more true than any other of the myths. However, it allows him to operate with a degree of comfort in the world, which is at least a modest end for a philosophic system and an attainable one. In "Apologia Pro Mente Sua" he says of his dogma, "It enables me to believe in common-sense and in materialism and, like Landor, to warm both hands before the fire of life; and at the same time it gives me the key to the realms of dialectic and fancy, which I may enter without illusion."

Not only is Santayana able to construct his particular dogma, but in action he becomes his own absolute. He is like Antonio in Auden's "The Sea and the Mirror," who cannot be enclosed in Prospero's final frame, who is outside the faiths of all the other characters. He is interested in the magic that Prospero has worked on them and on himself:

> given a few
> Incomplete objects and a nice warm day,
> What a lot a little music can do.

But Antonio remains untouched by it. Just as Santayana says,



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in *My Host the World,* "Nothing in me called for any conversion . . . ," so Antonio says:

> Your all is partial, Prospero;
> My will is all my own:
> Your need to love shall never know
> Me: I am I, Antonio,
> By choice myself alone.

The result of this personal absolutism is a tremendous assurance, toward which Auden seems to be yearning. Despite Caliban's long Jamesian speech which seems to indicate that Antonio's way is one of those "by which the human effort to make its own fortune arrives all eager at its abruptly dreadful end," despite Prospero's renunciation of art to face the necessity that "this journey really exists," it is Antonio and his certainty that carry the most strength. Auden, of course, is Prospero, now intent on traveling a difficult way, but one which, for all that it must be unique for him, has been laid down before. So Antonio's assurance, which he seems to admire, must within the poem become false assurance. And Santayana's assurance (which is apparent in the casual way that he can dismiss Bertrand Russell or the North of England, or in his calm assumption that the reader will be as fascinated as he is by the dull, if complicated, sex life of Stanley Russell, which could only be interesting if treated by S. N. Behrman in the spirit of his early plays) raises Auden's resentment. In a sense Auden tries to dismiss Santayana as cavalierly as Santayana dismisses others, but his style, now needling, now free-swinging, is plainly on the defensive.

An examination of Auden's career, a look at the changing intellectual allegiances that have been his since the thirties, suggests that he has been looking for just such a certainty as Santayana's. The dogma that he wants—and which he now thinks that he has found in Christianity—must be an operative tool; it must be the certainty that will let him pass through a dark room without falling over the furniture. Obviously it cannot be the same personal dogma that is Santayana's—for their minds and their worlds are not furnished in the same way. Auden, from the beginning, has been preoccupied with society as well as with the individual; he is



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incapable of the withdrawal that allows Santayana to get along with such ease. Perhaps the resentment that his review holds lies simply in his realization that Santayana has found what he seeks, but in terms that he, Auden, could never accept. The difference between the two is apparent in the central metaphor that each uses. Santayana calls himself a traveler; the very title of *My Host the World* indicates that he considers himself a stranger stopping at an inn. Auden speaks continually of a necessary journey which must be made, not only in "The Sea and the Mirror," where Prospero must make it, but in *The Age of Anxiety*, where four characters start on a journey together, but end, out of necessity, traveling each alone. The difference is, of course, that a journeyer is always going some place; a traveler always *is* some place. A journeyer must have a goal; a traveler does not need one.

The journeys that Auden has gone on have been various; he has still to reach a destination. Richard Hoggart in his book on Auden says, "He is, indeed, an incorrigible and energetic optimist, always setting off for frontiers or sailing for islands or heading for mountains." The particular nature of the goal that lay always before him grew out of his view of the world around him, formed during the thirties. The world he saw as sick, and the individuals within it shared its sickness. Auden was intent on curing both—and still is, although the emphasis has changed. His diagnosis made, Auden looked about for the cure-all, the dogma, and found it first in political action; he shared with Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice and other young poets of the thirties the vision of the poet as soldier, perhaps as leader, who, locking arms with his fellowmen, might march on to the newer, brighter world, might redeem the human condition. In "Spain, 1937," he wrote:

> And the life, if it answers at all, replies from the heart
> And the eyes and the lungs, from the shops and the squares of the city:
> . . . . . .
> "What's your proposal? To build the Just City? I will.
> I agree. Or is it the suicide pact, the romantic
> Death? Very well, I accept, for
> I am your choice, your decision: yes, I am Spain."

The poet had to make the decision and, at this moment, Auden knew what the decision was. He drove his ambulance in Spain. But



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strangely, for a man so in search of dogma, Auden has a strong strain of scepticism, or at least of doubt, and the political emphasis, the Marxist orientation, was not really a solution. In "New Year Letter," writing in 1940, Auden says:

> We hoped; we waited for the day
> The State would wither clean away,
> Expecting the Millennium
> That theory promised us would come,
> It didn't.

Psychological truth, too, had its day with Auden; he flirted with Freud, strangely enough, in the same years that he flirted with Marx. Here he hoped that, if the individual were cured by psychotherapy, the social neurosis might finally be laid to rest. Even in a comic song, the one that begins, "Let me tell you a little story/About Miss Edith Gee," in which the too virginal lady develops a cancer in place of the baby she needed to have and finally has her privacy completely violated by having her body hung in a dissection lab, the psychological solution is evident. Of course, Auden is not so facile, except when he is joking, but the doctrinaire is present under the laughter. Now that Auden's faith in psychotherapy has given way to the necessity for moral choice, his admiration for Freud, which he still retains, must be expressed differently. In an essay in the *New Republic* in 1952, he praises Freud for having rescued man from the dehumanizing hand of science; Freud's insistence on the peculiar nature of each case becomes a restatement of the individuality of the human personality contrasted to the scientific-statistical approach which necessarily sorts men into identifiable categories.

Briefly Auden appeared to withdraw into art, to find the salvation for the individual there, but the act of Prospero and the speech of Caliban in "The Sea and the Mirror" discard that position; the identification of morality with aesthetics, which would have put him closer to Santayana than any other of his temporary allegiances, is no longer possible to him. Auden is now a Christian, or is trying desperately to be one. As Hoggart says of his present work, ". . . whatever his ostensible subject, he discusses religious belief." The belief seems to be strongest in "The Sea and the Mirror"



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and "For the Time Being." In this last one, the meditation of Simeon ends with:

> And because of His visitation, we may no longer desire God as if He were lacking: our redemption is no longer a question of pursuit but of surrender to Him who is always and everywhere present. Therefore at every moment we pray that, following Him, we may depart from our anxiety into His peace.

The Chorus ends the poem, "He is the Way. . . . He is the Truth. . . . He is the Life." Yet in both these poems the emphasis is often on the struggle to believe, to find the right way, to reach the right goal. These poems were followed by *The Age of Anxiety* in which, despite Malin's last speech in which God appears to be salvation almost against the wishes of the saved, the emphasis is on the confusion, the uncertainty, the age of anxiety. None of the poetry of *Nones,* the volume published in 1951, indicates any new certainty that Auden has received from his new truth. Yet in the Santayana review Auden insists that he has found his way.

On the basis of his old disenchantments with Marxism and Freudianism, Auden appears to be a man who reaches anxiously after dogma to fulfill a quite sincere need. His final quarrel with Santayana lies in his inability to accept the concept that a man can be intellectually self-sufficient. He senses that Santayana is capable of personal certainty, but his perception turns to annoyance, even to anger. He says in the review, "Santayana's besetting sin, both in life and in his thinking, seems to be a refusal to take risks, an abnormal horror of being 'had.' " By positing that his own search is a universal one, Auden is able to transfer his needs to Santayana; Santayana's scepticism then becomes cowardice and Auden can use the accusation to shore up his new faith against any doubts that may be wearing it down. It would be comforting for him, and perhaps for everyone, if he had found the real thing at last, but the tone of his treatment of Santayana makes him appear to be still sadly on his journey and to be indignant at a man who apparently is secure enough to sit at the door of the inn and watch the uncertain pilgrims hurry by.



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# *If You Don't Mind My Saying So . . . . . .*

JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

Everybody seems to be interested nowadays in what is called "communication." The lowest of the low-brows dropped radio for television because they recognized TV as "a new medium of communication"—even if they did not call it that. The highest of the high-brows go in for semantics because that is the most esoteric aspect of the same grand subject. Meanwhile, all the in-betweens who busy themselves with World Problems talk about nothing more earnestly than "mass communication."

There are, they will tell you, good reasons for all this. Never before were there so many things which the world needed to know. Never before was it so important that everybody should understand what was once the business of "the ruling class" alone. Intellectuals must study semantics so they can communicate with one another. Educators and publicists must study "mass communication" so they can reach the Common Man. And if you object that the quality of the thing communicated seems to vary inversely with the ingenuity of the means used to communicate it, they reply that it need not be so.

Perhaps television drama is not so good as legitimate drama or, for that matter, so good as the movies. In fact, perhaps it has nothing to recommend it except (a) its accessibility and (b) the charm of novelty plus the wondering admiration which the invention arouses. But, they say, it *could* be first-class. There is no reason why Sophocles instead of Milton Berle, and Plato instead of Arthur Godfrey, should not be piped into every home.

"Propaganda" and "Advertising" are sometimes recognized as dangerous influences. They employ the Techniques of Communication to serve the selfish interests of individuals and groups. But that, we are told, is merely because the propagandist and the advertiser have got way ahead of everybody else when it comes to understanding how to communicate. The educator must wake up and catch up. He must take the instruments away from his opponents. They sell tooth paste and soap. They boast of creating "psychological wants" which nobody had until he was taught to have them. It is up to us to sell tolerance, good will, the scientific attitude and even, perhaps, wisdom itself by similarly proved methods.

That there is a catch in all this, nobody seems to be very much aware. But there is a catch, and the catch is this: The methods of the advertiser and the propagandist are not really usable for any purposes other than their own. They want their audiences to be as passive and uncritical as possible. Their methods are calculated not merely to make that audience believe what it is told, but also to believe just because it has been told. Their aim is to hypnotize and condition. The last thing they want is any thinking-for-yourself. Like the Bellman who went hunting for the snark, they have almost convinced even themselves that "what I tell you three times is true." Hence, what they are engaged in is not a kind of education but the direct opposite of education. The end result of their skill in one kind of communication is a group of listeners and



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"viewers" who are less than ignorant; it is a group which knows things that are not true and has become increasingly incapable of learning anything.

Nothing more clearly distinguishes a method of education from a technique of indoctrination than the fact that education demands from the subject some effort, especially some effort of attention, while propaganda does not. The advertiser will go to any length to make everything easy. The educator will see to it that something is expected of his pupil. He knows that no one can learn anything worth knowing unless he is willing to learn, as well as willing to be taught. He knows that learning how to learn is more important than any specific thing he can "communicate." And the grand question has now become whether or not the new techniques of mass communication inevitably and by their very nature weaken the power to learn at the same time that they make being taught so easy.

What so many enthusiasts of communication will not realize is that there is a point beyond which everything should not be made varied, vivid, picturesque, dramatic and "interesting." A time is sure to come when something which needs very much to be learned cannot possibly be made as vivid, picturesque, dramatic and interesting as certain other things. And when that time comes, only the individual who can turn his attention to what is most important, rather than allow it to be captured by what is most interesting, is capable of being educated.

Some years ago Mr. Clifton Fadiman used—and for all I know may have invented—the phrase "the decline of attention." Nearly everyone seemed to recognize its aptness. It covered everything from the school teachers' complaint that children would no longer take the trouble to learn arithmetic, to the publishers' discovery that "condensations" sold better than original masterpieces and that pictures which could be glanced at were increasingly preferred to articles which had to be read. The college student plays the radio while he studies because he cannot keep his mind on his books; vacationers at the beach take along a phonograph, a deck of cards and various other pieces of paraphernalia because neither the sea itself nor any one of their other diversions can hold them for long. Even the magazines which professedly address the more intellectual audiences find it continually necessary to become more "striking." The newspapers' discovery that bigger headlines paid off was followed by the magazines' discovery that only an arresting make-up would enable them to survive. No one can be expected any longer to open a monthly simply because he has learned from experience that it will contain something interesting. His attention has to be caught by a snappy title, a striking picture, a teasing promise held out. Even among more intelligent and better educated people it can no longer be assumed that they will *give* their attention. It has to be *caught.*

Some who are mildly disturbed by these phenomena explain them by saying rather sourly that we all "have too much," and that we are like a spoiled child who can never be entertained because he has too many toys. Others, refusing to be disturbed at all, explain rather complacently that ours is merely a world which is richer, livelier and more vivid than it used to be. But is it? Does a child who comes home from a school where he has had his "natural interests" nervously catered to, who then goes out to the movies and comes home again to a television set (this is precisely the usual routine of my friends' children) really lead a richer life than the nineteenth-century child who had nothing to do after school except read *Robinson Crusoe*? Does the adult who glances through a picture magazine, skims a news-weekly, watches ten minutes of a Senate investigation on TV, and then hears the scherzo movement of a symphony on the "Ford Hour" really live a richer life than his grandfather who actually read the *Atlantic Monthly*? It is not what you have available but what you take in that counts. And there are a great many adults, as well as a great many children, who don't seem to have time to take anything in.

Recent advertisements of a well-known



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encyclopedia make their pitch on the number of illustrations which that still valuable work contains and on the fact that it is "as interesting as a picture magazine." Perhaps it is. Perhaps it ought to be. But that isn't and ought not to be the most important thing about it. What kind of public buys an encyclopedia not because it is full, authoritative and accurate, but because it is "as interesting as a picture magazine"? It is more expensive than a picture magazine, and to buy it for the pictures is a waste of money. Is an encyclopedia wise to enter into such competition on such terms? Should a college compete with TV on approximately the same level? Or should colleges and encyclopedias alike assume that there still exists some audience for what only colleges and encyclopedias can give? Just how much should either know or care about certain techniques of communication?

Many of those who are advocating fuller use in education of "the mass communication media" seem ready to accept not only the limitations of those media, but the very techniques which most outrageously pander to those who cannot or will not really attend to anything.

Suppose we listen for a moment to a spot commercial. Our advertiser knows that his hearers cannot be expected to listen for even thirty seconds while being told about the wonderful new tooth paste which, for the tenth time during the past decade, has "revolutionized tooth care," and which is now urged upon him "for your tooth-brushing pleasure." Since thirty seconds is too long for the audience's span of attention, the message must be broken up thus: Three seconds of instrumental music followed by some odd sound, preferably one never heard before; ten seconds of a jingle set to nervous music; then a male speaker who makes one of the large claims which Dr. Johnson already knew as the essence of advertising. He is interrupted by a female voice which gurgles "Yes siree, that's true. That new element Abradabracan really did make my teeth sparkle." Then the male announcer takes over again, and there is a reprise of the jingle.

Now take a step up to one of the semi-serious commercial interview programs. Stripped of the various announcements and commercials, it may last ten or possibly even twenty minutes. Yet the chances are that there will be at least two visiting celebrities as well as the interviewer. Move another step up to one of the longer, more ambitious entertainment programs. It may be studded with "names," but no one stays on much longer than is necessary to prove to the listener that he was actually there. Turn finally to a serious noncommercial discussion program. The chances are three to one that it will present a "panel." But why? Is it primarily to promote an exchange of opinions, develop the sharpness of debate, et cetera? Perhaps. But isn't it also because no one speaker could hold the attention for that long? It takes at least two to tell about a tooth paste in thirty seconds; it takes quite a group of contrasting personalities to hold a "serious" audience for thirty minutes.

It seems to me (if you don't mind my saying so) that we have reached a point where "failure to communicate" is more often the result of a failure of attention—which no one seems to think we can do anything about—than of those imperfections in our techniques of communication which everybody seems determined to remedy, even if it means teaching patriotism through comic books, mathematics by moving pictures, and the principles of ethics as they can be expounded in a jingle set to music. Though most educated people seem to have agreed some years ago that the "commercial" is one of the ugliest and most humiliating phenomena of our civilization, some of these same people do not seem to realize how close they come to wanting to make what they call "popular education" one long commercial designed to sell science, culture, and right political thinking to people less and less willing to make any effort of attention.

Are what our school principals grandly call "audio-visual aids" usually anything



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more than concessions to the pupils' unwillingness to make that effort of attention necessary to read a text or listen to a teacher's exposition? Can anything be said in favor of most of them except that they are, at best, a surrender to the delusion shared by children and adults alike that the mechanical techniques of communication are interesting in themselves, no matter what (even if it happens to be genuine information) is being communicated? Are they not, at worst, merely devices for "catching" an attention which can never be given freely or held for long? How often can it be said that any movie, film strip, or recording teaches the so-called student—who has dwindled into a mere listener or viewer—more than could be learned in the same time with a little effort, or that the mechanical method has any virtue other than the fact that such effort is not required? Is there anything a picture can teach the pupil which is worth as much as that ability to read which he stands in very great danger of losing?

What those who so earnestly discuss the problems of communication seem to forget is that its success depends upon the sensitivity of the listener as well as upon the efficiency of the transmitter. Or as Shakespeare knew, the prosperity of a jest lies in the ear of him that hears it. What is the use of trying to make the jests simpler and simpler if the ears for which they are destined are to grow duller and duller? It is not a little learning but a little capacity for learning which is a dangerous thing.

At the moment, various educational institutions are making a new effort to use radio and, more especially, television for their own purposes. Perhaps, if it is not too late, they may succeed. But if they do succeed, it will be because they are more interested in what they have to communicate than in what it seems easily possible to communicate within the limitations the medium imposes. To those interested in the method itself there is nothing less suitable than a mere lecture. For purposes of true education it may very well be that there is nothing better. Fewer people will listen, but those who do will actually be getting what they might get at the college itself. On the other hand, try to use either radio or TV not as a mere mechanical means of diffusion, but as an institution which has developed its own methods, standards and techniques, and you will get a substitute for instruction as obviously inferior to what it has replaced as most TV drama is inferior to the stage play and most radio concerts inferior to what could be heard in a concert hall.

Colleges are among the few surviving institutions which sometimes put quality above quantity, which are not yet quite convinced that when you spread something wide that is all to the good, no matter how thinly you spread it. They may make use of the media of mass communication, but it is at least as likely that these media will make use of them. I am not at all sure that we ought to take the instruments of mass communication away from the advertisers. Perhaps we should let advertisers keep them. Perhaps we should have a little more faith in the media which are our own and which we know how to use.



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# The Revolving Bookstand

## Mr. Lippmann and Natural Law

ESSAYS IN THE PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY. By Walter Lippmann. *Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press-Little, Brown and Company. 189 pp. $3.50.*

Reviewed by ASHER LANS

At the beginning of 1919, writes Mr. Lippmann, the states of the Atlantic community seemed at the zenith of their powers. The world was at peace and democracy was triumphant; a better world was in birth. The appearance, however, was more illusion than reality. For the totalitarian counter-revolution which erupted in the ensuing decades now threatens to destroy our traditions of civility. This disastrous reversal, it is suggested, largely results from the triumph of Jacobinism and legislative and popular irresponsibility in politics, and of relativism and Godlessness in philosophy. We are betrayed by what is false within.

Mr. Lippmann's solution proceeds along several levels of discourse. Initially he considers the "functional derangement" of the democratic states, largely through analysis of their diplomatic failures. "The people have acquired power which they are incapable of exercising, and the governments they elect have lost powers which they must recover if they are to govern." This sonorous apothegm leads to the conclusion that the conduct of foreign affairs must be restored, under constitutional order, to the experts of the foreign offices and to the legitimate executive. The voters must content themselves with electing public officials; and legislative bodies must, through a process of self-abnegation, relegate their role to the occasional questioning of policy. For public opinion (which exerts an excessive influence on legislators) is congenitally uninformed, resistant to change, inclined to the negative and to the hyperbolic portrayal of the enemy as the "Hun."

The author is not content to rest his case on pragmatic grounds. He resurrects, with insufficient acknowledgment, the political gospel of Edmund Burke. *The People* are defined "as a community of the entire living population, with their predecessors and successors. It is often assumed, but without warrant, that the opinions of the people as voters can be treated as the expression of the interests of *The People* as an historic community." If an ordinary plebiscite will not permit us to discern the magic link between past and future, how then are the interests of *The People* to be determined? While this question is never explicitly answered, it is inferred that the solution is to establish a strong executive, free of pressure from special interests, restrained and guided by tradition and natural law.

In Lippmann's presentation, natural law is the elixir which resolves all problems. One of its most remarkable attributes is that it is capable of definition in a variety of ways. Sometimes natural law is a body of doctrine, immanent in the "external" world, which is "not the willful and arbitrary positive command of the sovereign power," but which is subject to verification and discovery "by any rational mind." Simultaneously, however, it is the consensus of the divergent views of the community of well-intentioned, disciplined thinkers, based upon scientific investigation as filtered by free and honest debate. In another formulation, natural law becomes a metaphor whose intellectual content is the sum of the "traditions of how the good life is lived and the good society is governed."

In a slightly rephrased formulation of the traditional conservative argument, it is suggested that liberty and "mass" democracy

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are inevitable enemies. "The enfranchised masses have not, surprisingly enough, been those who have most stanchly defended the institutions of freedom." For most modern men, freedom has become a "hollow shell," in which, because of the absence of guidance and affirmative convictions, the relief from the constraints of the ancient order has created an intolerable loss of support. In this state of public disorder, Hitler, with the insight of satanic genius, commented that "like a woman . . . who will submit to the strong man rather than dominate the weakling . . . the masses love the ruler rather than the suppliant. . . ." We must learn that true freedom exists only when men desire to act, as they rationally ought to act, within the framework of an ordered state. (This Aristotelian resolution is foreseeable, since the author acknowledges, in his foreword, his indebtedness to Dr. Mortimer Adler.)

The gloss and earnestness of Lippmann's rhetoric gives his work a somewhat unjustified persuasiveness. The well-turned epigram and the charm of style are used to outrun intellectual difficulties. Quotations from an unbelievable variety of authors—ranging from Eratosthenes to Erich Fromm, from St. Paul to David Riesman—bolster the argument. However, while rich in individual insights and provocative of thought, particularly in its dissection of certain democratic clichés, *The Public Philosophy* is, at many points, misleading and superficial.

Mr. Lippmann's first fallacy is his breast-beating doctrine of democratic degeneration. Of course, history is a book from which each reader can draw support for his own persuasions and find a basis for elevating his system of intellectual limitations to eternal truths. On the whole, however, the record refutes any contention that the executive function in the free states has become "devitalized." The problem of leadership in a democracy is basically that of electing officials who are willing and able to use the tools of government in a courageous response to changing circumstance. Roosevelt was able to govern at least as effectively and foresightedly as Jefferson. In a "time of troubles," Churchill was able to elicit as much popular support, with his call to toil and suffering, as William Pitt had been able to do. The special difficulties confronting even the strongest American Presidents inhere in the constitutional separation of executive and legislative organs. It is not the philosophy but the working institutions and mechanisms of our federal system which need reinvigoration, along the lines suggested in Thomas K. Finletter's neglected *Can Representative Government Do The Job?*

My second objection is to the derogation of popular sovereignty. If the people have no monopoly on wisdom and prescience, neither do Harvard graduates or the members of the "open end" British ruling class. It was, after all, the men of the foreign office who thought the Nazis could be appeased. If experience and specialized knowledge make for technical competence, they may also breed narrow-mindedness and obsessive preoccupation with routine and traditional thought patterns. Plato's disinterested philosopher-kings exist only in the dialogues of *The Republic.* Except through the painful process of trial and error, no actual republic has found any magic method to ascertain who its wise men are or to insure that competent candidates are elected to public office.

Thirdly, Mr. Lippmann's disinternment of natural law is totally unconvincing. As Mr. Tarn has demonstrated, natural law, in its Hellenistic origins, provided an ideological basis for superimposing a monarchy on the discrete Greek cities and, later, for subjecting Orientals to the same legal rules as Greeks and Romans, in order to create a unified state. The Jesuit Fathers, Bellarmine and Suarez, used the revived doctrine in the sixteenth century as a basis for establishing the independence of the Church in doctrinal questions and for exalting the Pope over temporal rulers, whose powers, derived by primordial compact from the people, were subject to recall by the people. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the theory of natural rights, to quote Morris Cohen, "proved a powerful weapon against established abuses by inducing men to appeal to rational principles of what ought to



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be." The Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution of the United States by the Jeffersonians (whom Lippmann would doubtless call quasi-Jacobins) to restrain the ruling classes who believed "in government by 'the rich, the wise, and the good'." In other contexts, theories of natural law have been pleaded by men of learning and reputation to justify monstrous anomalies, such as the sacred right of eight-year-old boys to work a twelve-hour day in the coal mines.

A major difficulty in believing in natural law is the quantity of divergent doctrines which have at various times been espoused under its ubiquitous mantle. For example, Calhoun contended that Negro slavery was ordained of Heaven and was the order of the universe, while the Abolitionists simultaneously and with equal certitude invoked natural law to reach directly contrary conclusions. As Justice Holmes observed, "There is in all men a demand for the superlative.... this demand is at the bottom of the philosopher's effort to prove that truth is absolute and of the jurist's search for criteria of universal validity which he collects under the head of natural law.... our test of truth is a reference to either a present or an imagined future majority in favor of our view."

A more serious weakness in the *Public Philosophy* is its Toynbee-like suggestion that the declining influence of the democratic states is principally the result of some collective moral fault. The surge of nationalism in areas newly liberated from imperialist rule; the chasm between proletariat and middle class in many West European communities; and the restless envy of the hungry populations of Asia and Africa have deep historic roots and pose dilemmas not susceptible to resolution by preachment about objective truths. Our principal problem is not moral weakness but lack of knowledge with which to meet unprecedented situations and an inability to pierce the barriers of misunderstanding and mistrust.

Mr. Lippmann's book concludes on a curious Machiavellian note: ". . . the reason the humblest citizen is not stronger than the hosts of error is that the latter also are clad in an armor which they at least believe is the armor of righteousness. . . . For political ideas acquire operative force in human affairs when, as we have seen, they acquire legitimacy, when they have the title of being right which binds men's consciences. Then they possess . . . 'the mandate of heaven'." In an international popularity contest, the precepts of self-restraint and of government by the elect can scarcely hope to succeed. Why then should the Western powers abandon the doctrine of popular democracy, with its roots in our own historic revolutions and in our own religions, and with its magic appeal to the dispossessed majority of the earth?

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MAN ON EARTH. By Jacquetta Hawkes. Illustrated. *New York: Random House. 242 pp. $3.75.*

Reviewed by PAUL B. SEARS

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PAUL B. SEARS has published many articles and books about ecology and conservation. He was recently elected president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.



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I have long thought that the time must come—if we can survive our own misuse of the physical sciences—when the discoveries of cultural anthropology will be recognized as the most significant contributions of modern science. But for the present we seem not to welcome those aspects of science which give us context and perspective. Many indeed are not willing to grant them the rubric of science. Whatever else science may be, it certainly is a manifestation of human culture; and the process which has engendered it can be ignored by scientists (and those who use them as a convenience) only at their peril.

It is as though we were all highly proficient at arithmetic, holding it capable of dealing with all problems that could be solved, unaware—or worse, contemptuous—of the power and beauty that lie in the



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## Literature and the Self

THE OPPOSING SELF. By Lionel Trilling. *New York: Viking Press. 232 pp. $3.50.*

Reviewed by ROBERT N. LINSCOTT

"Most of these essays," says Professor Trilling in his preface, "were written as introductions to books, and all of them were written for occasions which were not of my own devising." Perhaps for this reason the collection as a whole does not enrich the understanding nor fire the imagination to the same degree as its predecessor, *The Liberal Imagination*. Nor does any individual piece excite and delight as did those on *The Princess Casamassima* or *Huckleberry Finn*. Nevertheless, the total effect is to confirm the author's position as one of the two best contemporary American critics, the other being Edmund Wilson.

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*tonians*, Wordsworth, George Orwell, *Bouvard and Pécuchet* and *Mansfield Park*. To furnish an integrating principle, beyond the fact that they appear in a single volume, the author has added a prefatory thesis that the essays "all, in one way or another, take account of the idea that preoccupied this literature [of the last century and a half] and is central to it, and makes its principle and unity—the idea of the self. . . . I have dealt with more novelists than poets, but of course the novelists in their own way of particularity and circumstantiality are no less committed than the poets to the modern imagination of autonomy and delight, of surprise and elevation, of selves conceived in opposition to the general culture. This imagination makes, I believe, a new idea in the world."

As a unifying principle for so diverse a collection, this seems a little tenuous, or perhaps it is merely the best that could be devised for a collection brought together by chance. However, this in no way limits the pleasure of the essays themselves. Professor Trilling's mind is acute, speculative and wide-ranging. Literature to him is not a technique to be dealt with through "the psychological analysis of language," but (to quote from his earlier book) it is "the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty."

In a book as diverse as this there are bound to be variations in quality. At least two of the pieces, those on Howells and on *Mansfield Park*, give the impression of assignments gracefully and intelligently carried out, but assignments in which the writer's interest was not deeply engaged. This is especially true of the essay on Howells, but any survey of a novelist so assiduous, so well-meaning and so essentially dull is foredoomed to tepidness. One begins to suspect that, apart from his marmoreal value as a literary figure of the period, he most deserves immortality for having inspired that extraordinary simile in the *Atlantic Monthly*'s review of *The Kentons:* "It is as though one rode in a scarlet coat and with a winding of horns to a hunt of cockroaches."



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The essay on Keats and his "proud, bitter, joyous acceptance of the tragic life" is admirable. "Wordsworth and the Rabbis" is a curious comparison of the Law as the Rabbis understood it and Nature as Wordsworth understood it, with the conclusion that "the quality in Wordsworth that now makes him unacceptable is a Judaic quality." And an eyebrow must be lifted when the author couples Little Dorrit with Dante's Beatrice as "the Paraclete in female form . . . not only the Child of the Marshalsea, but also the Child of the Parable, the negation of the social will."

The two most deeply illuminating essays in the book are those on *The Bostonians* and on *Anna Karenina*. The thesis of the latter is that Tolstoi's "moral quality, his quality of affection, accounts for the unique illusion of reality that he creates. . . . Tolstoi omitted the evil which is at the center of the vision of his great contemporary, Dostoevski. . . . Nowadays the sense of evil comes easily to all of us. We all share what Henry James called the 'imagination of disaster,' and with reason enough, the world being what it is." But isn't the implication that evil is in the saddle today also an illusion? After all, evil in its connotation of insensibility to the rights and sufferings of others, is surely one of the most constant factors in human life; the difference today being one not of degree, but of impingement. What is implicit in a large part of contemporary fiction is not so much evil as emptiness; a vision of life without purpose, meaning or direction.

The essay on *The Bostonians* gives the effect of having been cut short with much left unsaid. But what it does say is perhaps the best that has been written about this finest novel of James's middle period. Particularly brilliant is Professor Trilling's illumination of Basil Ransome and his exquisite fitness as a Southerner for the role he is to play, and of the whole theme of sexual disorientation. "The conflict that James perceived was not the battle of the sexes which Meredith and Shaw delighted in, a fine formality of marching and countermarching and intricate maneuver on a commodious plain, chosen by mutual con-



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sent, the point of the engagement being to demonstrate that women have as bright a spiritedness, as firm a resolution, and as particular an intention of sexuality as men. The opposing forces met on the field as if by appointment, they were animated by the sense of adventure, and defeat brought nothing much worse than honorable captivity on parole. The conflict which James describes was very different from this. It was the bitter total war of the sexes."

After stumbling through the underbrush of the average critical essay, it is a pleasure to encounter wit such as this, together with precision, understanding and a style that clarifies rather than obfuscates.

## A Rare Objectivity

DEMOCRACY AND MARXISM. By H. B. Mayo. With a Foreword by Walter Bedell Smith. *New York: Oxford University Press. 364 pp. $5.50.*

Reviewed by DAVID L. MARKS

Professor Mayo has, in a series of lucid expositions, first described and then subjected to the scrutiny of logic and history the philosophy of dialectical materialism, the economic interpretation of history, the theory of the class struggle, the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of proletarian revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat, the philosophy of history of Marxism, its scientific pretensions, and its relationship to morality and religion. Though admittedly writing with the bias of a democrat, Mr. Mayo has been able to maintain an objectivity which is all too rare during our bitterly partisan era.

Mr. Mayo traces the familiar development of dialectical materialism, the underlying general philosophy of the Marxist system, from its Hegelian origins to its more recent manifestations in Soviet Russia. He concludes that Marxism has contributed nothing to philosophy, but that we owe a

✪ DAVID L. MARKS, a member of the New York State Bar, was in charge of the prosecution of the Communist leaders in the case of the *United States* v. *Flynn et al.*



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# FREEDOM *LIMITED*

## An Essay on Democracy

Marten ten Hoor, professor of philosophy and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Alabama, has written here what he calls an "inventory" of his own beliefs about democracy. In doing so, he has taken full account of the major attacks against and the major defenses of our form of government, so that his book goes far beyond a mere subjective approach to his subject.
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xiv, 203, illustrated $4.50

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# BARUCH SPINOZA AND WESTERN DEMOCRACY

**By Joseph Dunner**

Here is an interpretation of Spinoza's fundamental ideas in the light of the social problems of our own time. The author, Chairman of the Political Science Department at Grinnell College and life-long student of Spinoza, demonstrates the significance of *The Ethics,* the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise* in the struggle of our Western civilization with the totalitarian claims made by the protagonists of both the Soviet and the Fascist systems of government.
$3.00

*"An effective exposition of Spinoza's basic ideas and principles in manageable compass."*—Henry Pratt Fairchild, Professor Emeritus, New York University.

*"Will prove to be of great value to students of comparative political theory."*—Taraknath Das, Professor of History, Columbia University.

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limited debt to the dialectic for its emphasis on conflict, change and process in nature and society, and on a dynamic point of view.

Whatever there is of value in Marx, we are told, is to be found in his analysis of history and society. While crediting to Marx more than to any other person our current acceptance of the importance of economic influences throughout society, Mr. Mayo does not overlook the "exuberant distortions" of Marxists in their attempts to synthesize all history into terms compatible with their aims. He explores the unresolved dualism between strict economic determinism and free will, between the Marxist axiom that the economic foundation determines the superstructure of society and the course of history, and the importance attached by Marxist-Leninists to the area of propaganda and ideas.

Marxism asserts that the dialectic has operated in history through the medium of the class struggle, which under capitalism is sharpening and can end only in revolutionary victory for the proletariat. We are first shown through brief but suggestive examples the limited extent to which history supports the theory of the class struggle. This is followed by a relatively detailed analysis of the failure of modern capitalist society to develop as Marx had predicted, and of the failure of Lenin's theory of imperialism to save Marx's prediction of a sharpening, explosive class struggle.

The theory of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat has been called by Stalin the heart and core of Marxism-Leninism. In the chapter devoted to this subject, Mr. Mayo first points out how the concept of the Communist party as a rigidly disciplined, monolithic elite of professional revolutionists was developed by Lenin under the stress of local conditions in Russia, but has become the model for others elsewhere. He then expounds and criticizes the Marxist-Leninist theory of the necessity of violence for the overthrow of capitalism and bourgeois governments, and the tactics to be pursued by Communist parties before the revolution. He reveals clearly how the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which to Marx and Engels was to be a relatively democratic form of state power during the temporary transition between the overthrow of the capitalist state and the evolving of the classless and stateless utopia of the Communist society, became in the hands of Lenin and Stalin a justification for the rule of a small minority during an "entire historic period." Though it may be captious to note an omission in a work which encompasses so much in a volume of modest size, nevertheless, inasmuch as the author has mentioned that Marx excepted England, Holland and the United States from his doctrine of violent revolution, it would have been preferable to add that Lenin and Stalin, in passages which remain dogma to this day, limited Marx's qualifications to the era when he wrote, and specifically stated that in our age of imperialism, militarism and bureaucracy, the law of violent proletarian revolution applies to the United States. Stalin speculates that if, "in the remote future," the present (i.e., 1924) capitalist encirclement is replaced by a socialist encirclement, a peaceful path of development is quite possible for certain capitalist countries; but he emphasizes that there is no ground whatsoever for this supposition with regard to the immediate future. Since the doctrine of capitalist encirclement is also utilized to justify the indefinite prolongation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Soviet Russia, we are not likely in our era to find any admissions by Marxist-Leninists (despite their present claims to control a substantial part of the earth's territory and population) that capitalist encirclement has given way to socialist encirclement.

In analyzing Marxism as a philosophy of history, the author discusses limitations inherent in any attempt to encompass all of history within a single pattern, scrutinizes the Marxist claim to have laid bare the inexorable laws of nature and society, and sums up the error behind Marx's dialectic law of history by saying that Marx "was merely universalizing his private plans for capitalism." With respect to the claim of Marxism to be the only real science of society, Mr. Mayo argues that Marx's theory of



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historical materialism does not withstand examination and that his predictions as to the future of capitalism and the proletarian movement, though containing many insights, have often been wrong. Furthermore, his followers in Russia today, far from being scientific in their social analysis, do not tolerate skepticism or criticism of their classics. Varga's economic theories were assailed not on the evidence, but because they departed from orthodoxy.

The Marxist critique of society is stated to be chiefly moral, based upon a sense of injustice over the excesses of capitalist society, but Marxist-Leninists scorn bourgeois morality and subordinate their moral theory to whatever will further the class struggle. The essential principle of Marxist moral practice, according to Mr. Mayo, is the doctrine that the end justifies the means, which in the last analysis constitutes one of the fundamental differences between Marxism and democracy.

In the last two chapters of his book the author assesses briefly the underlying assumptions first of political, then of social and economic democracy, and explores the reasons for the irreconcilability of the theories of Marxism and democracy. He affords us a balanced and occasionally eloquent appraisal of a world in conflict, and a prognosis which, though not optimistic, is challenging. To this reviewer it is surprising that so careful an observer, while recognizing that the word "democracy" has been pre-empted by the Marxist-Leninist world, should relegate to unimportance questions of definition of democracy. If definitions could be substituted for dogmas many of our problems would be on the way to solution. Perhaps, however, the author had the same thing in mind when he wrote that disputes about democracy are usually concerned not with definitions at all, but with the different kinds of society which different people want.

For the thoughtful citizen of any democracy, Mr. Mayo's analysis of the basic beliefs of Marxism and his evaluation of the tenets of Marxism as contrasted with those of democracy will be as enlightening as they are challenging. No military leader would plan an operation without as scrupulously accurate a study of the enemy's capabilities as is available from all possible sources. In the far more complicated struggle now in progress, the study of the enemy should be made not by our leaders alone, but by each citizen for himself.

## *Brief Comments*

POLITICS IN AMERICA. By D. W. Brogan. *Harper. $5.00.*

Mr. Brogan's avowed purpose is "simply to make the American political system intelligible." He might, justifiably, have added, "to Americans and others alike." Certainly his extensive knowledge of American life and history, his scholarly analysis, his humor and store of anecdotes combine to make this a book of value to politicians, historians and laymen on both sides of the Atlantic.

In explaining the present, he reviews the whole dramatic kaleidoscope of a nation's progress toward realizing the "Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness" promised by the Declaration of Independence, and the "more perfect Union" proposed in the Constitution. Along this progress lie the elements of Gunnar Myrdal's *The American Dilemma* (the disparity between promise and performance), and the faults and virtues emerging from the stresses of a fixed system whose rapid growth demanded unforeseen flexibility. Brogan's analysis is more kindly than in his *American Political System* (1933), but he still does not close his eyes to manifest faults. Rather he looks beyond the seemingly useless or faulty institutions to reveal the function they perform—particularly acute are his accounts of the role of "machines," "honest" vs. "dirty" graft, and national conventions—and so to explain how they contribute to the system's essential success. This shrewd Scotsman concludes that the system *is* a success—for the good reason that it works!

IAN H. WILSON



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FREEDOM LIMITED: An Essay on Democracy. By Marten ten Hoor. *Alabama.* $3.50.

This essay is not only a competent restatement of supposedly well-known facts about the workings of democratic government, but also a valuable and minute analysis of its essence. The study begins with the democratic ideal of government—which makes no claim to be the ideal government—that men can and must better learn to govern themselves. Democracy recognizes that rule by the people means rule subjected to the fallibility of human beings, and, therefore, is based not on a rigid ideology but on the reality of everyday affairs.

When millions of men—each with his own needs, desires and principles—are given the franchise, when power is equally distributed, one might expect the result to be social chaos. Indeed it would be, were it not that the proponents of democracy believe in government founded on the principle of self-correction by peaceful and orderly means. The spirit and method of compromise, by election or decision under the law, are therefore recognized as necessary rules of procedure. In his discussion of "self-correction" and "compromise," Professor ten Hoor treats two of the essential facts of democracy which particularly distinguish it from all other forms of government.

This is a book for every American who would clarify the reasons for his political beliefs, and for any foreign reader who would understand the free citizen's faith in his form of government.

RONALD FRAZEE

THE FIFTH AMENDMENT TODAY: Three Speeches. By Erwin N. Griswold. *Harvard.* $2.00.

Dean Griswold's timely book on some aspects of the Fifth Amendment represents a thoughtful discussion of crucial civil liberties problems, all the more valuable because it emanates from a distinguished, conservative lawyer. Although two of the three essays were originally speeches delivered before lawyers' groups, all three are nontechnical and deserve a wide audience.

A brief survey of the honorable history of the privilege against self-incrimination is followed by hypothetical cases designed to illustrate how an innocent man may be justified in claiming the privilege. As many are wont to overlook, the privilege against self-incrimination is part of an amendment which also contains the due process clause and the prohibition against appropriation of private property without just compensation.

The Fifth Amendment is rightly called a symbol of the moral sense of our nation, and of the essential dignity of the individual. Mr. Griswold points out that before public opinion condemns a man for asserting the privilege, it should assay two factors: the subject of the inquiry (conventional crime or private beliefs), and the nature of the tribunal (courts or legislative investigations). Should we not add a third—the private citizen or one vested with a responsibility to the public?

DAVID L. MARKS

TWO MINUTES TILL MIDNIGHT. By Elmer Davis. *Bobbs-Merrill.* $2.75.

Rarely is war, particularly a war of "absolute" weapons, discussed with candor; but Elmer Davis, who prodded the public's understanding of America's heritage of freedom in his prize-winning book, *But We Were Born Free,* issues, in this companion volume, a trenchant declaration of what we must do when and if we enter another global war.

He does not think that we can rely on Goodness, God or the present Administration to keep America out of war. Indeed, for Mr. Davis, our foreign policy seems to be conducted by children who blunder badly: too stingy to pay for an effective defense system, too naïve to sustain friendly relations with other nations. However, if war comes, "We must not quit, we must not surrender." The author joins those thinkers who feel, and realistically so, that a war of absolute weapons is not so terrifying as the absolute victory they make possible. The idea of living in the world of "Big Brother" is, to Mr. Davis, as to most



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of us, more horrible than death. The situation is presented succinctly: "The next war, calamitous as it would be to everybody, would not destroy civilization unless we lost it."

*Two Minutes till Midnight* is not a lengthy book, but it is a potent one. It causes the reader to look at himself with a start and to wonder if he is capable of Mr. Davis' kind of heroism.

JANE HALE

HUMAN SOCIETY IN ETHICS AND POLITICS. By Bertrand Russell. *Simon & Schuster. $3.50.*

A pending world crisis threatens human society. The crisis can only be averted through a more profound comprehension and realization of man's nature.

According to Mr. Russell, man is "solitary" and expresses his individuality through moral codes. He is also a member of the group, and the social side of his nature finds expression in political action. Yet morality and politics, as expressions of conscious desire governing blind impulse by reason, are closely associated, since the actions of each ultimately tend toward the same end. They both aim at the "good," which is defined as the satisfaction of desire. However, an obvious distinction is necessary between "my good" and the "general good" as total satisfaction of desires by members of the community. In isolation from concomitants and consequences, any desire-and-satisfaction is equally good, but in event of conflict the general good predominates because it enjoys logical priority. What promotes the general good is right conduct inspired by right desire. A desire which is "compossible," i.e., harmonizes with others, is right, while that which thwarts the desires of others is wrong.

From this ethical formulation the duty of politics clearly follows—to effect compossible actions. Yet this formulation, charmingly simple and logically elegant, demonstrates little that was not proposed by the theories of Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

LEWIS A. FOSTER, JR.

GIFT FROM THE SEA. By Anne Morrow Lindbergh. *Pantheon. $2.75.*

It is increasingly evident, in book publishing at least, that it is not only possible, but a very good idea to serve God and Mammon at the same time. The attainment of this goal must have motivated the publisher of Mrs. Lindbergh's first book in eleven years to decorate the jacket cover with "An answer to the conflict in our lives." The reader who has the courage to go beyond such a forbidding announcement deserves the reward which he will find in this exquisite little volume.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh would be the last person to offer packaged salvation. A talented writer graced with a maturity resulting from a particular knowledge of herself and a diverse knowledge of other people, she has attempted to set down some of her thoughts, questions and suggestions on the problems and frustrations of the multiplicity of twentieth-century living. The sea of life is no bigger nor more complex than the small particles which compose it, Mrs. Lindbergh affirms; and "when we start at the center of ourselves, we discover something worthwhile extending toward the periphery of the circle."

The calm and positive conviction about the here and now makes the reading of *Gift from the Sea* as good as a day in the sun, a happy departure from the shadows of the tomes of doom.

BETSY SAUNDERS

THE HUMAN BRAIN. By John Pfeiffer. *Harper. $3.75.*

In language which will please both the layman and the scientist, Mr. Pfeiffer has presented a vivid and careful account of what is presently known about the human brain. Today's brain research, described in terms which are easily understood by readers without a scientific background, is gaining new insights into emotion, memory, learning, neurosis and mental disease. Some of these insights challenge popular beliefs. For example, the birth trauma theory of the Freudians would seem to be somewhat weakened by the knowledge that a newborn



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baby possesses a nervous system which is designed to protect it from shock. However it is not Mr. Pfeiffer's business to draw conclusions. His emphasis is upon the tools which are being developed to solve what is essentially still a puzzle. He says, "There is something tantalizing about the fact that the most complex structure we know in the universe lies snugly packed inside our heads. It is a case of so near and yet so far." But, as he makes clear, a start has been made, and it is a tribute to his skill that the unraveling of the complexities of the human brain seems to be the most exciting adventure man has yet entered upon.

BETTY AJAY

THE PREVALENCE OF PEOPLE. By Marston Bates. *Scribner's. $3.50.*

Biologist Bates bites off a huge mouthful in this book; yet, because he masticates neatly, at no point does he choke. Quickly the reader finds himself in the midst of a provocative one-man symposium devoted to the well-known social animal, who is examined in terms of population, food, conservation, disease, reproduction, death, eugenics, et cetera.

Despite optimism here and there, ever staring out of these crackling, glib, often brilliant pages is the spectre of human society traveling full circle and, via destructive forces apparently of its own making, being in the extreme case reduced to former agrarian levels; or of society headed for a totalitarian species of world organization operating under the blight of "human engineering." With hope but without overwhelming conviction, Bates looks to some vague sort of perfectibility of man, or, more especially, to the improvability of human culture as a possible source of civilization's uncertain salvation.

Science, in functioning as a humanity, can surely help. But, the author concludes cryptically, it is only one of the arts that will serve mankind to meet the challenge of the future. To this, add Bates's not wholly tongue-in-cheek statement that science is the characteristic art form of Western civilization, and we have a book of almost limitless dimensions.

PAUL A. ZAHL

AFRICA TODAY. Edited by C. Grove Haines. *Johns Hopkins. $6.00.*

Coming in the wake of a recent profusion of books about the enigmatic continent, *Africa Today* is an important addition to this literature. C. Grove Haines has edited a group of articles which together form a systematic evaluation of the African scene by men whose outlook is scholarly and whose interest in Africa is professional. The contributors are university people, businessmen and government specialists who were invited to speak to the Conference on Contemporary Africa held last summer by the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. The problems that confound Africa are treated in historical perspective and in the light of the aspirations of Africa's politically mindful minority to have a voice in the determination of its future. If there is a single theme it is, as Melville J. Herskovits said, "to assess change in terms of the pre-existing patterns of life."

The clearly authoritative articles by Sir Phillip Mitchell, Elizabeth Colson, Kofi Busia, and others make the book of unquestionable informational value both to the scholar and to the casual reader. But the quality of these presentations is not maintained throughout. In one chapter the entire relevance of the remarks can be questioned.

Some omissions would have improved this work, but few will fail to recognize it as a needed and welcome addition to literature about Africa.

ROBERT CATTELL

THE INDIAN AND THE HORSE. By Frank Gilbert Roe. Illustrated. *Oklahoma. $5.00.*

According to the stereotyped view held by most laymen—a view reinforced by romantic fiction and the motion picture—the American Indian and the horse are inseparable. This is not so much a reflection of



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popular ignorance as it is an indication of how completely the horse became integrated in the culture of our Western Indians after they acquired it by theft from Spanish frontier settlements of the early seventeenth century.

In a very real sense the horse revolutionized and revitalized the way of life of the Plains tribesmen. Formerly a semi-sedentary people, they became one of the most completely nomadic societies the world has ever known.

Mr. Roe relates this epic of the plains in a book of high scholastic merit. He is interested not so much in technological and descriptive minutiae as in broader problems: where and how did the Western Indian acquire the horse, and how and to what degree did it affect his mode of life? The first question he answers as completely as would seem possible, considering the fragmentary data available. With regard to the second question he is on firmer ground, and he analyzes the role of the horse in hunting, warfare, economics, prestige values, and even in tribal psychology. The format of the book is handsome, and the illustrations are excellent.

HARRY TSCHOPIK, JR.

THE PASSENGER PIGEON: Its Natural History and Extinction. By A. W. Schorger. *Wisconsin. $7.50.*

This book will interest students of American history, ornithologists, ecologists, and wildlife conservationists. Chapter by chapter, it brings together everything of importance that has been published on the most abundant bird ever encountered by modern man.

The sheer numbers of the passenger pigeon still stagger the human mind. In the nineteenth century, relatively few men could visualize the possibility of the bird's extinction. In the twentieth century, many needlessly speculate on some complex reason for its dramatic disappearance. To this end, Dr. Schorger has compiled a definitive account of the natural history of the pigeon and prepared a critical analysis of the forces leading to its extinction. The sixteen chapters cover such topics as the bird's food, behavior, movements, roosts, nesting, utilization by man, and decrease. While the text on the whole makes for an interesting chronicle, especially to conservationists and ornithologists, seven chapters at the end of the book cover such technical aspects as anatomy, description, nomenclature, migration dates, late records, and illustrations; these appear to be appendices of reference materials subordinate to the main account. The text occupies 302 pages; references, 104; and the index, 15.

The passenger pigeon lived and died on a prodigous scale. In life, it could blot out the sun. In death, it proved that no wildlife resource is inexhaustible. This scholarly book leaves no doubt that ruthless market hunting carried this beautiful bird into oblivion.

JOSEPH J. HICKEY

A TRAIN OF POWDER. By Rebecca West. *Viking. $3.75.*

In this collection of six essays written between 1946 and 1954, Rebecca West observes that "If a trial for murder last too long, more than the murder will out." Using various courtrooms as a background, she captures transitory events with her journalistic skill, much as insects were trapped in amber long ago. She analyzes the sadism of the Nazi war criminals and dissects a small South Carolina town which is experiencing an entirely different kind of violence, the mob-killing of a Negro.

The Nuremberg studies are concerned with the paradox of victory. Justice is not enough; individuals, even in defeat, overshadow abstracts, and the defeated always demand recognition of their individuality. The lessons learned and not learned at Nuremberg are a basis for the author's speculation on the cold war in 1954.

Throughout *A Train of Powder* runs the problem of hidden cause. "Opera in Greenville" is perhaps the most successful courtroom excursion. The defendents are obscure people made newsworthy because they not only killed, but killed with the dark blood of prejudice on their hands. The Nu-



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remberg trials were made necessary because civilization had gone wrong; the Greenville trial was a product of ignorance.

For Miss West, "news is always an incarnation"; she can produce a thoughtful essay on almost any given subject. Her admirers will be pleased to see that she has exhausted neither her love for words nor her ability to construct graphic images.

JANE HALE

BEAUREGARD: Napoleon in Gray. By T. Harry Williams. *Louisiana. $3.75.*

For long there has been needed an authoritative biography of General P. G. T. Beauregard. Colorful and popular, Beauregard's military career was as controversial as that of any Confederate general; his postwar career, since he became one of the few wealthy ex-Confederate generals, unique. T. Harry Williams, in this admirable biography, has fulfilled the need.

Beauregard was in command of the Confederate forces around Charleston at the time of the firing on Fort Sumter; second in command at the Battle of Manassas; for a time commander of the Army of Tennessee, one of the two principal Confederate field armies; and charged with the defense of the South Carolina and Georgia coasts in 1863. In 1864, he was given a command in Virginia, and, finally, in 1865, served as commander of the Military Division of the West. His career is an important aspect of Confederate military history.

Was Beauregard a great general? Was he even a good one? His biographer concludes that he was not great, but surely competent. Proud, quick to anger, resentful of orders, Beauregard sometimes compared himself to Napoleon; Williams' subtitle, "Napoleon in Gray," is apt. As a general, Beauregard's weakness was his "penchant for grand planning, the disregard of logistics, the exaggeration of results to be attained"; his strength was his sound strategic sense and his ability to handle men on the field.

Seldom has military history been written with such felicity. The story of complicated battles is told with a clarity and dramatic skill that make this volume a model military biography. Professor Williams has achieved what biographers seldom accomplish: a narrative of suspense, one which keeps the reader engrossed and concerned over the outcome.

J. E. COOK

THE INTELLIGENT HEART: The Story of D. H. Lawrence. By Harry T. Moore. *Farrar, Straus & Young. $6.50.*

Lawrence, as prophet and devil, has been passionately admired and abused in highly charged prose works by his friends and foes since his death twenty-five years ago. And now comes Mr. Moore, unique among Lawrence's biographers in that he never knew him personally, with an objective and definitive book which places Lawrence, the writer, among artists of the first rank. Unfortunately, the general reader may find the nearly endless detail tiresome; Mr. Moore has a tendency to get bogged down in minutiae, particularly in evaluating, in Freudian terms, the influences in Lawrence's childhood which shaped his growth. Also, we are offered here keys to the characters and incidents in the novels vis-à-vis their counterparts in real life to such an extent that one wonders if Lawrence can properly be called a writer of fiction. Apart from these minor defects, Mr. Moore's book is significant for its fascinating new material and fresh insights. Eighty of Lawrence's letters (and who has written better ones?) appear here for the first time. Noteworthy among these are letters of his last years, many of them dealing with the writing and publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in which their author emerges as a triumphant figure of morality and courage.

JOAN CUYLER

THE SOLITARY SINGER: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman. By Gay Wilson Allen. *Macmillan. $8.00.*

When *Leaves of Grass* was first published in 1855, Ralph Waldo Emerson shrewdly and succinctly guessed what Gay Wilson Allen corroborates with impressive scholarship, warmth of personal identification and persuasive documentation in his critical



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biography of Walt Whitman. The sage of transcendentalism simply assumed that the volume of unorthodox poems was the consequence of a "long foreground somewhere for such a start." Its great power made him happy and he found "incomparable things said incomparably well."

In that small volume of ninety-five pages, nine of which were devoted to a preface, containing "Song of Myself" and eleven other poems, there was evidence of much reading, study and stylistic experimentation; here was far more than a self-portrait, more than rowdy posturing and certainly more than a glorification of sensuality. It was, and remains, a mystic's joyous plunge and total immersion into the stream of life.

In 1857 Emerson wrote to Charlotte Sturgis Tappan: "Our Whitman with real inspiration but choked by Titanic abdomen," and again tersely offered a critical appraisal of the spirit and visceral power of the poet in a ten-word summary. A century, lacking two years, later, this almost telegraphic characterization has been elaborated into a full-length portrait by a man who has devoted twenty-five years to its creation. His is a distinguished addition to the gallery of some fifty biographies of Whitman, including the notable works of Emory Holloway, Henry Seidel Canby and the minutely and relentlessly recorded four-volume *With Walt Whitman in Camden* by Horace Traubel.

*The Solitary Singer* conveys vividly and with acute insight the facts and meaning of Whitman's long, varied, haphazard and frequently paradoxical life. Mr. Allen evaluates the poems with an equally sure perception, and that is a formidable feat when one considers the magnitude of the "kosmos" Whitman took into his lusty embrace.

SAXE COMMINS

GERTRUDE LAWRENCE AS MRS. A. By Richard Stoddard Aldrich. *Greystone. $4.95.*

The story of Gertrude Lawrence has belonged to an admiring public for many years. Now, with the publication of a biography written by her husband, both her story and her public will grow. For both on and off the stage, she was a talented and gracious woman.

Although the biography actually deals with only her twelve years as Mrs. Aldrich, ending with her death in 1952, it is a colorful kaleidoscope which gives many insights into her past life and into a personality which was as gold and silver as the gowns she wore, as sturdy and capable as her large hands. Happily, Mr. Aldrich has presented some of her letters, a collection of which might well become a basic primer in the communication of love: "Goodbye darling —I shan't be long—be good—eat well—and sleep—alone. Mrs. A."

The book is so well written, enjoys such a flow of continuity from one anecdote to another, that some mention should have been made of the person or persons who assisted in the collecting, sifting and polishing of the material. Sidney Feinberg is to be congratulated for an exceedingly handsome book design, and the Greystone Press for having had the good taste and judgment to make an investment in fine workmanship and paper.

BETSY SAUNDERS

THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES. By W. H. Auden. *Random House. $3.00.*

Whatever one may have come to think of the poetry of W. H. Auden will not be contradicted by this slender volume, for it is all here—from the exasperating to the sublime. The devotional, "Horae Canonicae," is the finest of the three sections of the book, certainly as excellent as Eliot's "Ash Wednesday," which it occasionally, with its long, superbly balanced cadences, suggests.

In the title poem, as in the other lyrics in the second section, "In Sun and in Shade," Auden, the social commentator, continues in his dogmatic, amusing, if somewhat less ferocious vein. The couplet "Epitaph for the Unknown Soldier"—"To save your world you asked this man to die: / Would this man, could he see you now, ask why?" —is reminiscent of his early "The Unknown Citizen." Although several of his opinions may strike one as questionable, and may



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continue to do so increasingly in the future (the myth of progress, the concept of civilization as a "lesser evil"), no one can question the earnestness, high mockery or skill with which they are promulgated.

Auden is inordinately fond of cats; one of his favorite selections in English poetry is Christopher Smart's tribute to Geoffry. In this second section, I found his heroic memorial to the family cat—Greek, both in its sentiment and syntax—particularly moving:

At peace under this mandarin, sleep, Lucina,
Blue-eyed Queen of white cats: for you the Ischian wave shall weep,
When we who now miss you are American dust, and steep
Epomeo in peace and war augustly a grave-watch keep.

The most serious detriment to Auden's complete success is his self-consciousness, which continues crashing into his sentiment—this is particularly evident, and extremely disastrous in moments of great tenderness—like a boisterous colt into a field where deer graze. It is this dichotomy which makes "Bucolics," the first section, something less than the moving pastoral it might have been.

I have had no doubts for better than fifteen years, but I believe that now, after the oratorical "Horae Canonicae," no one can question Auden's position as one of the most gifted of the half-dozen major poets writing in the English language today.

DACHINE RAINER

THE BLACK PRINCE. By Shirley Ann Grau. *Knopf. $3.50.*

*The Black Prince* is a volume of stories by a new Southern writer who, in common with other "new Southern" writers, belongs to a school and practices a genre of writing that is notable mainly for its tenuity, or, if you will—and perhaps better—its subtlety. However, in Miss Grau's case, there is no subtlety of language or style. Indeed, her language is so vernacular and strong as almost to threaten the delicate nuances of mood, emotion and impression—especially when in moments of carelessness or self-consciousness she produces a sentence as gnarled and unlovely as a dead cypress root.

There are such moments, though rare, and more of them in "White Girl, Fine Girl" than in all the other eight stories together. "White Girl, Fine Girl" does not quite succeed, and it does not quite succeed principally because the central element in the story—a man's woman-hunger after years in prison—creates so high a center of emotional gravity that the delicate balance of character and emotion (in Jayson himself, for instance, and in the three half-sisters) is lost. But this story is the only failure, though the author could easily be forgiven more, since all the stories are of the kind called "experimental." Miss Grau experiments and, among other things, she seems to be lining up symbols—constellation symbols, metal symbols, weather symbols, color symbols, name symbols—trying to fix them into a systematic order before she leaps into the first long, sustained piece of writing in which she will employ them. She gives the reader of her present volume every reason to hope that when she does write a novel, she will have as clear a claim to critical tribute as any "new Southern" writer since Eudora Welty.

SAUNDERS REDDING

THE CORNERSTONE. By Zoé Oldenbourg. Translated by Edward Hyams. *Pantheon. $4.50.*

While most critics and critical readers look the other way, appalled by the crudity and cheap sensationalism of the great bulk of modern historical fiction, several sound historical scholars who are also fine novelists continue to produce notable work in their much-abused field. One of the foremost among them is Zoé Oldenbourg, the Russian-born and French-educated author of *The Cornerstone.*

This is a sequel to *The World Is Not Enough*; but its enjoyment does not require knowledge of its predecessor. On a vast canvas swarming with dramatic action and crowded with picturesque detail, Mme.



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Oldenbourg has painted a huge panorama designed to interpret the medieval character during the early years of the thirteenth century. To do so, she has allotted her space almost equally to three protagonists, all members of the same baronial French family. The three, grandfather, father and son, represent: the natural man, who is neither good nor evil, but profoundly influenced by the culture of his time; the evil man the world always has with it, who takes advantage of the social customs of his time to indulge his appetites; and the young idealist, who responds with perhaps excessive self-sacrifice to the demands of war and those of chivalric love and of religion.

*The Cornerstone* is long, solid and filled with many minor characters who are as well portrayed as its three heroes. Its narrative drive is sustained with great skill, and its interpretation of an age is continuously illuminating. Mme. Oldenbourg is careful to offer her views on the Age of Faith through the minds and actions of her characters, thus avoiding the crime against fictional craftsmanship—direct exposition. This is a distinguished novel in the great tradition of *Henry Esmond, The Cloister and the Hearth* and *The Golden Warrior.*

ORVILLE PRESCOTT



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# ..... The Scholar's Scratch Pad .....

MARGARET MEAD

*Prescript: Those of us who have worked with an analysis of the imagery characteristic of a culture—as expressed in oral and written literature—have come to feel that discrepancies, contradictions, and different rates of change in different parts of a culture are delicately reflected in figures of speech. Stated concretely, this means that while a mixed metaphor, or a conspicuously purple passage, may sometimes be the result of ignorance of a form, or carelessness, it is more likely to be highly significant and overdetermined. The remarks which I have just put together on "The New Isolationism," and which follow this note, worry me, because there are too many different images running through them. Yet, when I tried to arrange these images into a single, sustained figure of speech, this didn't work out. I have concluded that the way the edge turns into the center, and a garden into a canoe, must in some way, however clumsily and awkwardly, be related to what I am trying to say. So, after the manner of old-fashioned ladies who carry one glove to show they know they should have two, I am leaving the lot—with this explicit recognition.*

## The New Isolationism

I work in an area which has been called "the growing edge of knowledge," where hypotheses sprout so verdantly that many people are certain that either tropical—and unhealthy—heat must be responsible, or that they must be, after all, weeds, no real garden-ready plants fit for cultivation. Nevertheless, most of the time this is a very pleasant place to be; life is never dull, and one need give only an occasional, sympathetic backward glance at the grumblers who spend their time finding that many of the hypotheses bear no fruit, and who always feel that there are definitely too many of them.

It would be a wholly pleasant place to work if we hadn't begun applying our science, as well as trying to add to the orthodox corpus of known and tested knowledge. For the trouble with application is that it must always be done now. Real plants or real pests, real people, real countries and issues, existing in the present and in need of something or other—fertilizer, sprays, nourishment, modernization, resolution—are the proper objects of applied science. It is the children of today who need polio vaccine, different methods of discipline, and improved methods of learning to read. If we are to have a world consciously shaped closer to men's needs, we must be prepared to act now, before each theory is tested.

This moral is aptly adorned by the story, dear to the public-health worker, of the Chelsea pump which saved London because the father of public health dared to act by taking off the handle of the pump, from which he hypothesized, without full information, that in some unknown way typhoid

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fever was spreading. However much the cautious may decide to peg their credulity at the bottom of the alphabet—not to trust any vitamins above D or any enzymes discovered this year—the practitioners who are committed to the care and well-being of living human beings won't wait. Avid for solutions, for the hospital, the nursery or the foreign office, when they attend at all to the findings of the laboratory, they attend with far too much vigor for the comfort of the research scientist.

One of the consequences of all this is that anyone actively concerned with developing the kind of hypotheses which promise some help to mankind has to spend a lot of time putting out fires. No sooner is a preliminary skirmish won—contemporary critics and opponents convinced of the validity of some position—than, before the grass has grown green again on that battlefield, one has to be off apace to start a skirmish against those who have accepted the new idea too thoroughly and too well. Because circles of applied science ripple out from the first flung stone of speculation, the new battle often has to be fought long before most people have become familiar with the last victory. A battle for the advisability of breast-feeding babies may be so over-won in a metropolitan center that it is already time to warn mothers that some babies can only live on artificial food, even while in a nearby suburb the local physicians and parents-in-law have not yet heard that breast-feeding is anything except hopelessly old-fashioned.

If the research worker is to continue on a straight path, this can only be maintained by energetic oscillations, periodically referred to as "betraying a generation," "escapism," "loss of youthful faith," "becoming seduced by success," et cetera. And all the while one feels more and more like the old visiting nurse who complained that after climbing stairs for years to tell those Italians to *stop* feeding their babies tomatoes, she now has to climb them all over again to tell them to *start* feeding tomatoes.

It is only ten years since I was writing memoranda pleading for a recognition that there were elements in German culture which provided dangerous groundwork for certain social behaviors reminiscent of paranoia. Yet the stencils for those memoranda hadn't shriveled before a further extension of ideas of German cultural character meant that we were involved as a nation in distinguishing *among* Germans, counting some individuals as potentially democratic, others as hopelessly authoritarian, with all the resulting muddle of denazification—an originally useful hypothesis run riot in the service of punitive postwar measures.

It was in the spring of 1941 that Theodore Abel read, to a hostile audience of Eastern sociologists, a paper in which he suggested that wars were after all made by identifiable *men*, individual, identifiable, living men, and that one way to stop wars was to make them unprofitable for such men. That audience, in 1941, *knew* that wars were made by the "forces of history," and that the "great man theory of history" was all wrong. From defending Abel's position, the need to lament the particularity of denazification and the way in which the Nuremberg trials neglected the difference in cultural theories of responsibility—where we emphasize responsibility for content, and the Germans responsibility for obedience—seemed either no distance at all or a complete reversal of attitude.

So, accustomed as I am to the continual requirement of assuming the next intractable position, I recognized the all too familiar signs of uneasiness when I read Richard Hofstadter's "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt" [*American Scholar*: Winter, 1954-55] and Riesman and Glazer's "Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes" [*Partisan Review*: Winter, 1955] within a week of each other, and found myself thinking insistently of an article by Charlotte Knight [*Collier's*: July 9, 1954] called "What Price Security?" These three articles reminded me of each other in a way I couldn't place. Was it simply that one's first impressions were so favorable? For *Collier's*, "A really first-class job on how the morale of the State Department has been wrecked by politically irresponsible individuals"; for Hofstadter,



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"Here at last is a historian taking psychology seriously" (the last time he and I had talked, I had been the one arguing for historians including the human organism in their frame of reference); or for Riesman and Glazer, "A really good demonstration of how the characterological regularities of a class or occupational group must be taken into account." These were first impressions.

The second thought came almost at once, "Why is the world situation left out? Why are the explanations offered so local, so particular?" For the state of the State Department, Charlotte Knight offers "three basic causes": "Change of Administration," "a twenty per cent reduction in force," and "President Eisenhower's Executive Order, 10450." For the rise of pseudo-conservatives, Richard Hofstadter offers "status anxiety," the closing of many opportunities for social mobility, the awakening of "mass man" by "mass communications," the "long liberal tenure of office," and, almost as an afterthought, the continuation of world crisis. Glazer and Riesman suggest the discomforts of prosperity to the new rich and the new middle class; lack of upper-class models; fear of loss of newly acquired income; fear of homosexuality; and hatred of intellectuals, Harvard men, and the Eastern seaboard.

All three articles ignore the state of the world in favor of parochial explanations which invoke individual personalities—McCarthy; McLeod; a paranoid employee who wrote out for the Secretary of State a roster of all the names of everyone who was in the Department when Alger Hiss was there (for this she needed shelf paper!); or less specifically identified Texas millionaires; or, more diffusely still, old-Americans losing ground, or new-Americans worrying over just having won it. All the explanations are cogent, but aren't they all a new form of isolationism—an isolationism which sees all, or almost all, of the "basic causes" or the "developments which make intelligible" as internal to American history? Glazer and Riesman contrast the struggle with nazism, "made real by its domestic opponents," with the struggle with communism, identified only by a "pathetic passel of domestic Communists." Essentially, American life, in and out of the State Department, is presented as subject to purely American pressures, most of them psychologically stated. Charlotte Knight quotes psychiatrists; Riesman and Glazer, the super ego elements in anti-Semitism and the id elements in anti-Negro feeling; and Hofstadter invokes the psychoanalytically oriented, German-modeled, authoritarian personality study,[1] in which the character structure of lower-middle-class Americans is equated, with a disregard of cultural differences, with the character of lower-middle-class Germans as prone to victimize the weak.

So psychology and class analyses and attention to cultural character, all valuable methods for which it has seemed worthwhile to fight, become themselves, in the hands of those who articulately deplore isolationism, a subtle, new, reactive form of isolationism. After the first flush of pleasure because the State department situation was so forthrightly exposed, one notices that there is never a mention of Communist methods, hardly a mention of espionage. The entire situation might have been a nightmare on the moon, so little is it related to the real events of the last twenty years, as Americans began to acquire some familiarity with the strategy of the United Front, with spies and spying, with "security" and "covers" and little labels which said "for American eyes only." Only as a final end of a whole string of developments does Hofstadter mention the world crisis. There might be no atom bomb, no hydrogen bomb, no explicit insistence on a polarized world, no Communist China to alter the attitudes of the American people, to pinch and prune their luxuriant sense of national assurance, to plunge the mobile young into an orgy of grabbing at opportunities which they are sure will be snatched from them by conscription, to tear people loose from the certainties of their old invincibility.

It all reminded me of an incident after a meeting where a noted psychoanalyst and

[1] Theodore W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1950), pp. 675-76.



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I had spoken on the same panel, and she had discussed the psychological roots of anxiety. As we left the auditorium, an earnest young man approached her to ask: "But Doctor, isn't it realistic to be anxious about the atom bomb?" And she answered that after patients are psychoanalyzed, they stop worrying about the atom bomb. I came away wondering whether analysis shouldn't be limited to those whose vigilance in international affairs was not urgently needed.

In the isolationist atmosphere following World War I, it was as much as an anthropologist's professional life was worth to suggest that every single invention of the high civilizations of the New World—agriculture, architecture, the calendar, mathematics, highly organized states—were not home-grown and absolutely independent of Old World influences.

In 1949, at the International Congress of Americanists held in New York, anthropologists challenged this theory of total autonomy of American Indian cultures, and the challenge was barely noticed. This seemed encouraging. The enormous popular interest in *Kon-Tiki*, however bizarre the historical theory it was meant to demonstrate, seemed to suggest that Americans were welcoming a feeling of being part of a wider world. When the ocean became a best-seller, it looked as if we were really becoming reintegrated into the world our forebears deserted. But we seem to be coming precariously close to that same post World War I position in our discussions of the present political climate in the United States by insisting that our illiberality is a completely domestic product. In the tenor of the discussions of anti-McCarthyism, there seems to be a persistent retreat from recognizing the rest of the world.

During the long controversy over which social science concepts could be applied most fruitfully to Germany, we ran the whole gamut: emphasis on culture; emphasis on the character of specific individuals and members of particular classes; and finally, a return to an emphasis on situation with a recognition that no amount of tinkering with German culture in an attempt to democratize it—undemocratic as it undoubtedly was—or liquidating, physically or socially, the more authoritarian or sadistic German personalities—authoritarian although they undoubtedly were—would solve the relationship between Germany and the rest of the world unless due cognizance was taken of Germany's situation in Europe. Even if we erect a hierarchy of principles on the legitimacy of interferences—seeing the changing of an individual as his own business; or seeing that of a professional, responsible practitioner of teaching and medicine: changing the culture of a society as the concern of the citizens of that society; seeing that the changing of the situation of a nation is the concern of other nations who participate in that situation—we may still ask whether castigating ourselves and some of our current national trends without reference to the world situation, in which we nevertheless participate, isn't an abdication of responsibility.

Meanwhile, in the clinic and the classroom, in the writing of social scientists and the deliberations of international bodies a new concept is clamoring for acceptance—the concept of *identity*, "the adolescent search for identity," the need for "a national identity," "the significance of ethnic identity." Dickinson laments the loss of identity in Scotland; and Nigel Dennis skits it all in his coruscating new book *Cards of Identity*, in which a new whimisical elite solve the servant problem and the problem of boredom by playing games with identity —turning upper-middle-class sycophants into butlers and maids by psychological sleight of hand. It's a useful approach, this emphasis on identity, focusing attention on what seem to be burning problems of the present age. One is reminded of the small South Sea communities confronted by the armies of great nation states as they suddenly discover the meaning of nationality, and, in terms of their hundreds or few thousands, try to build a group identity to give each of them a dignity with which to meet the modern world. It seems to be a concept that could be used with profit to add a non-isolationist dimension to the



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Riesman, Glazer, Hofstadter, *Collier's* analysis, the question of a change in our definition of our national identity which reverberates, although often without conscious recognition, down to the small child who comes home from school with eyes wide and frightened because the teacher said that there were other countries in the world "bigger than the United States."

But, even as I write this, I am reminded of a conversation in 1943 with a sensitive young Viennese who devoted himself to pleading for certain ways of combining voluntary and governmental activity. He concluded, with wry conviction, "Ten years from now I'll have to defend the opposite position just as enthusiastically." When I heard that the beautiful English adjective "voluntary" had been transmuted—by some phrase-maker in an international agency—into a horrid abbreviation, N.G.O. ("non-governmental," sounding extraordinarily like "no bloody good"), I realized that the time had come for his prophesied shift.

Doubtless the new isolationism, with its overemphasis on psychology and class character, will be replaced in no time at all by a compensating overemphasis on the impairment of our national identity by our situation in the world. Meeting on some other train, after some other of the delightful conferences in which the allegedly persecuted and repudiated intellectuals of the present time can (if they wish) spend all their days in profitable and enjoyable converse with their peers in many disciplines from many parts of the world, Richard Hofstadter and I will find we have again changed sides.

The alternative is withdrawal from the implications of our hypotheses, a refusal to recognize that each fleeting generation must apply what science there is if they and the scientists among them are to complement each other within a shared climate of opinion. And for the human sciences, certainly no other position is thinkable. Even if we must live through compulsory spinach, to spinach loved for the sake of Popeye, to the ambivalently greeted discovery that nobody got anything except roughage from spinach (unless it was creamed), still we moved in ten years from being a country in which a quarter of the population was ill-fed, to being one whose major nutritional problem was overeating. Perhaps both the true conservative and the true progressive have to learn the art of running from one side of the boat to the other in order to keep the world on an even keel, thereby, as the Iatmul of New Guinea phrase it, "rocking the canoe to increase one's self-confidence."



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# The Reader Replies

*The Reader Replies carries miscellaneous comments by readers and authors on various articles which have appeared in the magazine. All communications should be addressed to: The Editor, The American Scholar, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington 9, D.C., and should not exceed three hundred words in length except on request. Because of limitations of space, we cannot guarantee to print all letters received.*

—Editor

## *Testament*

May I be permitted to decline weeping for Mr. Prezzolini's woes as he recites them in your last issue and tries to bequeath them to us under the title "Testament"? I do not, of course, know Mr. Prezzolini's circumstances but only his report of them, and it is only because he turns them into a symbol of modern life that I venture to deny him the sympathy he seems to be asking for. Had he ascribed his views to a fictional character, my wish to refute him would be the same, that is, equally vehement and impersonal. Indeed, there is a kind of fictional quality about Mr. Prezzolini's statement, and it leads one to deal as much with the implicit as the explicit points of his argument.

His chief animus is directed against a world which has robbed him of safety, pleasure, dignity, and comfort. He has to shine his own shoes and cook his own meals; New York besoots his belongings; he misses the company of the wise which he enjoyed in Italy; and all he can look forward to is extinction under the bomb. Though he blames himself on several counts, we are made to feel that he deserved a better fate, because he is a cultivated man and a man of good will, who for the last twenty-five years in this country has tried to further cultural exchange.

It is certainly not for me to judge his deserts, though I cannot help noting, apropos of cultural ambassadorship, that his paper was not written in English but had to be translated.

When Mr. Prezzolini gives other, deeper proofs of his isolation, he exposes his fatal inconsistency. For he is at once proud of his capacity for despair—the modern feeling of "we unhappy few"—and resentful of the hardships that the position entails. It is thus that he arrives at the combination of contempt for "damned human nature" and regret over not having pursued more selfish personal interests. He boasts of a lifelong extremism dispersed in many directions, yet is surprised that he has not accomplished much. His conclusion is that history is the work of Cain, all is futility, and "the entire past seems a huge mistake."

Maybe it is, but the passage from one's conviction of error to damning the whole human race seems a bit steep, especially since the test of mankind's damnation is just that it has spoiled, for one of its members, the culture and the amenities created by the rest. One does not have to think the world good in order to see that hatred for it must observe certain forms. For example, one should recognize the claim of human solidarity before making up one's mind to secession.

In all this, one clue lies neglected, though it appears twice in the accuser's confession: He describes the way the unhappy few talk to one another, with irony, aloofness, and a sense of aridity and impotence. All the while, what they desire is love. It would seem, then, as if the heartache, which being fellowmen we cannot wholly refuse to share, is somewhat less than cosmic. Its origin is not even material but akin rather to a tragic mistake of judgment and perverse failure of style—as when the hero and heroine miss their chance at a mutual declaration.

Perhaps to keep the tragedy from turning comic, Mr. Prezzolini concludes by waving the bloody bomb. This should really be seen for the illegitimate sentimentality it is. Even if we are to perish by the blast, we dare not



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argue by it. The world may end with a bang *and* a whimper, but it is still a duty to be guilty of neither.

ROGER DU BÉARN

★ ★ ★

While I think that a liberal society and a liberal magazine should not turn their backs on so likable a personality as Mr. Giuseppe Prezzolini, or allow his voice to be wholly drowned, especially now when his voice is fading, I believe that the thing next in order of merit would be a scrutiny as close as possible of the soundness and validity of Mr. Prezzolini's world view to the effect of re-establishing in the minds of the more naïve of your readers some kind of equilibrium.

In publishing Mr. Prezzolini's "Testament" [AS: Spring, 1955], you have exposed your readers to one of the most gently melancholy and sophisticated voices from among the chorus of anti-intellectualism, anti-rationalism, pessimism, neo-Augustinianism—from the desperate and despairing wing of existentialism. In so doing, you have, unwittingly or not, inadvertently or not, from good-natured, liberal broadmindedness or from motives altogether beyond my ken, catered to a powerful trend in contemporary America: unaware or not, you have bowed to the nascent neo-American way of life, in which I seem to detect, alas, a host of Old World acquaintances. Even in the past, the acquaintanceship, in my case at least, never led to anything but intellectual repulsion, accompanied by such sad misgivings as Cassandra must have experienced when listening in Troy to politico-philosophical conversations. Now, I cannot help deploring that America—in the nineteenth century, a forerunner in terms of enterprising hopefulness, sanity and reason—in the second half of the twentieth appears to have grown ready to embrace the very philosophies that ruined so many kingdoms, empires and republics of the past. In any long-range perspective, the emergence to fashionableness of basically reactionary misanthropic anthropologies, of *Weltschmerz*, cynicism and despair, must be seen as the first beginnings of the end. I seem to feel assaulted daily, as it were, by pointers and by signs; and not the least ominous of these signs happens to be the publication, without the feeblest semblance of editorial warning or dissent (in the form, for instance, of a short prefatory note) of Mr. Prezzolini's "Testament."

Nothing of significance, of course, ought to be withheld from the American reader; and I readily grant that, in its own peculiar way, Mr. Prezzolini's "Testament" is an important document. Yet neither should the general reader be left exposed helplessly to the lethal siren song ascending from the unlabeled vials of ancient yet ever freshly fashionable poison. All the more so, because —for seemingly paradoxical but on the whole fairly obvious reasons—the distillers of literary poison are often more talented than the usually philistine tribe of critical toxicologists or the bakers of sound bread. Only the wise can afford occasional excursions into the domain of "delightful" error and unwisdom. Nor do they need to be told what is toxic and what not. Yet, how many wise men are there?

BERNARD GUILLEMIN
Brooklyn, New York

★ ★ ★

In answer to Mr. Guillemin's temperate and thoughtful letter, we of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR would like to say only that whether or not our confidence is justified, we do mean to keep the pages of the SCHOLAR open to all sorts of divergent points of view. Moreover, except on those rare occasions when we present differing attitudes toward a given subject, we refrain from commenting editorially on the position or orientation of any given writer.

We do not know how many wise men there are, nor are we persuaded that the same man will necessarily be wise on any two consecutive occasions. If we err in failing to make explanations, we at least prefer to err in that way rather than by joining the ever-increasing number who tell people what to think.

Two ironies emerge. The first is that while the pessimistic and despairing tendencies that Mr. Guillemin appraises so accurately (I believe) have come into fashion, we of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR have constantly been under attack for our old-fashioned adherence to "defeated causes": progressivism, optimism, rationalism and liberalism. Hence our surprise that this one article should cause alarm. The second irony is a happier one. It is just that in refusing to "explain" the attitude in any given article that we publish, we confidently count on receiving just such letters as Mr. Guillemin has sent us. This is not to disavow the essay by Mr. Prezzolini. It is rather to point out that Mr. Guillemin's letter (as does in a different way the one from Roger du Béarn) demonstrates effectively that we can rely on at least some of our subscribers and readers to think for, and express, themselves.

ED.



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